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ABSTRACT

The Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights prepared this report as part of its responsibility to advise on civil rights in Illinois and in response to an article about race relations at Proviso West High School, Hillside (Illinois) that appeared in "The New York Times." To study the racial climate and educational opportunities at the school, the Committee solicited the opinions of 45 students, 18 faculty and staff members, and some administrators, parents, and community members. The "Times" article described the school as a school built in the 1950s as an all-white school that was considered a model of educational opportunity. As the racial composition of the school became predominantly minority over the years, the economic status of the area declined, and residents of the community began to vote down school referenda. Following an introduction, the second part of this report gives background and demographic information on the school and community. The third part presents comments of student participants, and the fourth section contains the remarks of faculty and administrators. Part five presents the statements of parents and community members, and part six presents the Committee's observations and conclusions. It seems that a residual attitude of prejudice from parents and friends is found in the communities that feed students to Proviso West High School. It also seems that the students have learned to tolerate and ignore prejudicial behavior at school and among their peers as long as it is not directed towards themselves. Five appendixes contain the "Times" article, some supporting letters, and a statement from the article's author. (Contains 16 tables.) (SLD)

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ED 408 386

# Race Relations and Equal Education Opportunities at Proviso West High School

## Illinois Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights

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**March 1996**

*A report of the Illinois Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. This report will be considered by the Commission and the Commission will make public its reaction.*

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# Race Relations and Equal Education Opportunities at Proviso West High School

Illinois Advisory Committee to the
U. S. Commission on Civil Rights

March 1996

*A report of the Illinois Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. This report will be considered by the Commission and the Commission will make public its reaction.*

## Letter of Transmittal

Illinois Advisory Committee to the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

**Members of the Commission**
Mary Frances Berry, *Chairperson*
Cruz Reynoso, *Vice Chairperson*
Carl A. Anderson
Robert P. George
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Constance Horner
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Russell G. Redenbaugh

Mary K. Mathews, *Staff Director*

The Illinois Advisory Committee submits this report, *Race Relations and Equal Education Opportunities at Proviso West High School*, as part of its responsibility to advise the Commission on civil rights issues within the State. The report was unanimously adopted by the Advisory Committee by a 12–0 vote. The Advisory Committee is indebted to the Midwestern Regional Office for its assistance in organizing the forum and preparing this report.

The Advisory Committee held a community forum at Proviso West High School on November 30, 1994, and December 1, 1994. The meeting was held subsequent to an article in the *New York Times Magazine* on May 25, 1994, by H.G. Bissinger, "We're All Racist Now." At the request of the Commission, we solicited student, faculty, and community opinion on the racial climate and educational opportunities at Proviso West high school.

The Advisory Committee heard from 45 students, 18 faculty and staff, administrators, parents, and individuals who live in the surrounding community. To obtain an accurate reflection of student opinion, a sample of 30 students was randomly drawn from the student population; additionally, another group of 15 student leaders was interviewed. Fifteen of the 18 faculty participants were also selected at random. In addition, students and faculty quoted in the article were afforded the opportunity to speak at the meeting. There was also a public session, at which anyone could address the Advisory Committee, and written comments were accepted.

Additionally, the author of the article, H.G. Bissinger, was provided a draft of the report. His response is in appendix V.

The Advisory Committee hopes the Commission finds this report of value in its monitoring of racial and ethnic tensions.

Respectfully,

Joseph D. Mathewson

Joseph D. Mathewson, *Chairperson*
Illinois Advisory Committee

## Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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* Faye Lyon was Chairperson of the Advisory Committee at the time the community forum took place.
† Was not a member of the Advisory Committee at the time the community forum took place.

## Contents


**Part 1. Introduction** ..... 1

**Part 2. Proviso West High School** ..... 5
Student Background, Enrollment, and Achievement ..... 5
Teacher Background, Tenure, and Class Size ..... 8
School Discipline ..... 10

**Part 3. Student Comments** ..... 11
Selected Student Leaders ..... 11
Students Selected by Random Sample ..... 14
Volunteer Student Comments ..... 19

**Part 4. Faculty and Staff Comments** ..... 20
Administration ..... 20
Faculty and Staff ..... 22

**Part 5. Parent and Community Comments** ..... 28
Parents ..... 28
Community ..... 33

**Part 6. Conclusions and Observations** ..... 38

**Tables**
1. Population by Race/Ethnicity of Communities in Proviso Township High School District 209 . 1
2. Racial/Ethnic Background Rates and Total Enrollment ..... 5
3. Limited-English Proficient and Low-Income Student Rates ..... 6
4. Attendance Rates, Dropout Rates, and Chronic Truancy ..... 6
5. Graduation Rates ..... 7
6. IGAP Average Scores for Reading, Mathematics, Writing, Science, and Social Studies ..... 7
7. American College Testing Scores, 1993–94 ..... 8
8. Teacher Racial/Ethnic Background ..... 9
9. Mean Teacher Experience ..... 9
10. Teacher Salary and Per Pupil Cost ..... 9
11. Class Size ..... 10
12. School Suspensions by Race and Ethnicity ..... 10
13. Student Leader Participants ..... 12
14. Student Participants ..... 15
15. Faculty and Staff Participants ..... 22
16. Parent and Community Participants ..... 28

**Appendices**
I. *New York Times Magazine* article, "We're All Racist Now" ..... 40
II. Letters from the Commission to the Attorney General and the Secretary of Education ..... 52
III. Letter from Jeffrey VanderMolen to the *New York Times Magazine* ..... 54
IV. Faculty Institute Agenda, Proviso Township High Schools, August 25, 1994 ..... 55
V. Response of H.G. Bissinger ..... 57

Part 1

# Introduction

The cover story of the May 29, 1994, *New York Times Magazine* reported on Proviso West High School, a public high school in Hillside, Illinois. The school is located in a near western suburb of Chicago near the juncture of the Eisenhower expressway and the tristate tollway. The author, H.G. Bissinger, writes:

> Proviso West started as a jewel of a suburban high school. But then for 20 years the school board, faced with the needs of a growing influx of black students, fretted over maintenance and patronage hiring. Whites fled, standards fell and "We're all racist now."[1]

Proviso West High School is one of two high schools in Proviso Township High School District 209; the other is Proviso East High School. Ten communities feed the high school district: Bellwood, Berkeley, Broadview, Forest Park, Hillside, Maywood, Melrose Park, Northlake, Stone Park, and Westchester. Table 1 gives the population and racial breakdown of the communities.

The *Times* article described Proviso West as a school built during the 1950s in a then all-white suburban area west of Chicago. At the time of its building, it was considered a paragon of educational opportunity for its students. But conditions in and around the school changed. Between 1970 and 1990 the racial composition of the school became predominantly minority, and residents of the community voted down all school referendums.

> Built in the late 1950s with a $6.75 million bond issue, [Proviso West] was more than a school: it was a symbol. At the dedication ceremonies on Nov. 16, 1958, the

TABLE 1
Population by Race/Ethnicity of Communities in Proviso Township High School District 209

| | White | Black | Latino | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bellwood | 4,457 | 14,240 | 1,197 | 347 |
| Berkeley | 4,390 | 230 | 304 | 213 |
| Broadview | 3,696 | 4,631 | 187 | 199 |
| Forest Park | 10,983 | 1,926 | 734 | 1,275 |
| Hillside | 6,366 | 472 | 440 | 394 |
| Maywood | 2,631 | 22,542 | 1,795 | 171 |
| Melrose Park | 13,884 | 155 | 6,303 | 517 |
| Northlake | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| Stone Park | 1,605 | 19 | 2,544 | 155 |
| Westchester | 16,377 | 144 | 315 | 465 |

Source: Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR, from 1990 Census of Population, Illinois, table 6. Separate data for Northlake was not available.

1 H.G. Bissinger, "We're All Racist Now," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 29, 1994, p. 27 (hereafter referred to as *Times* article). The complete article is in app. 1.

words of the American educator James Bryant Conant were invoked, "Our purpose is to cultivate in the largest number of our future citizens an appreciation of both the responsibilities and the benefits which come to them because they are American and free." . . .

Over the past decade, Proviso West has experienced a dizzying degree of demographic and socioeconomic change. In the 1990–91 academic year, 11 percent of the students were from low-income families. This year [1994], the figure has almost doubled, to 19 percent. In 1973–74, the school, with roughly 4,500 students, was less than 1 percent black and Asian, nearly 2 percent Latino and 98 percent white. Now 20 years later, there are only 2,300 students, of whom roughly 56 percent are black, 22 percent Latino, 18 percent white and the balance Asian.

Between 1970 and 1990, the population of the township shrank nearly 12 percent, to 152,000. Pockets of middle-class comfort became increasingly harder to find. Factories and companies that had once prospered there shut their doors. Looming over these unhappy developments was rampant white flight: as the black population more than tripled, the white population plummeted. Whites are still the predominant racial group in Proviso Township, but in the past two decades their numbers have fallen 40 percent.[2]

In writing the article, Bissinger was allowed full access to the school, classes, faculty, and students.[3] Particularly poignant were statements attributed to students and faculty about race relations at the school. The article depicts a school divided along racial lines, with negative stereotypes pervasive among students and faculty. The racial attitudes and feelings of six white students in an honors course are reported as descriptive of white student sentiment.

"It's like going to hell here," says one. "I get pushed, and because I'm white I can't do anything because there's too many of 'em. I'll get my butt kicked."

"They think they can touch you, they think they can do anything to you."

"I cannot stand the [black] race. I'll never date anyone who isn't white."

"They're always saying 'slave' this and 'slave' that. Sorry, I don't know a slave. I never owned a slave. I'm sick of them throwing it in our face."

When asked to describe a typical black, one of the students responds this way: "Ignorant, rude, loud."

"Ignorant and scum, a lot of poverty, self-righteous, you owe me that, you owe me this, gimme, gimme, gimme," says another.

One student brings up a scene in "2001: A Space Odyssey" when a group of apes goes out of control: "In a typical day in the hallways, that's what it looks like here." Others laugh and nod their heads approvingly. They think it's a good description. They like it.[4]

In a similar manner, the author uses statements from the black students in the same honors class to capture the racial attitudes of black students.

When the [black students] talk about whites, it isn't with bitterness but with frustration, almost amusement. Of the seven only one says that the experience of being at Proviso West has made her feel more prejudices against whites. They laugh about the way whites insist on talking to them in what they think is "black dialect"—the way they say, "What's up" and "Hey girl." They also laugh at the way whites, when they go on field trips, stare out the window of the bus and exclaim over graffiti, as if they had never seen it before. The whites strike them as being insulated and utterly unaware of the larger world outside their communities.

These black students also talk about the way other black students often treat them, about how they are accused of being "nerds" and "sellouts" because they are on the honors track. "Why are you in a class with all the

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2 Ibid, p. 28.

3 Eric L. Eversley, superintendent, Proviso Township High School District 209, Maywood, IL, interview, Sept. 30, 1994, Midwestern Regional Office files.

4 *Times* article, p. 52.

white kids?" they are asked. "Why are you using a white man's book?" . . . "They are really shocked that a black male can read," he says. "They expect me to take the book and throw it in my locker." He described the following interplay between teacher and student as being typical:

"Excuse me, I'm just trying to wake you up so you can pay attention."

"Well, I'm going back to sleep because you ain't sayin' nothing."

Because of the expectations that many white (and black) students have of them, these seven [black] students exist almost entirely in their own world. "We're not accepted by the white people because they think we're not smart enough. . . . We're not accepted by black people because they think we're too smart. So we just hang with each other."[5]

Bissinger buttresses these thoughts with comments from faculty members. Six teachers are quoted in the article. Only two of the six speak positively of the school and its students. Ann Rebello, a social studies teacher, is described in the article as finding her students "open [and] yearning for attention."[6] Alexis Wallace is portrayed as a teacher "convinced that learning isn't a question of aptitude but of motivation and self-confidence,"[7] and is depicted in one particular classroom setting prodding and pushing students to higher achievement.

But the other four teachers have negative attitudes and feelings attributed to them, both about the school and its race relations. Two are alleged to talk of the lack of spirit in the building and the futility of teaching at the school. To one the author alleges an open racial hostility toward minorities.[8] For the other, the author travels back in time 20 years and refers to recollections of the "ominous tone of the meeting" when new racial boundaries for the school were announced.[9]

Mary Frances Berry, Chairperson of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, read the article and brought it to the attention of the full Commission at its June 3, 1994, meeting. Berry related:

There was a *New York Times Magazine* article on May 29, 1994, it was the cover story of the *New York Times*. . . . And there is a teacher quoted in the article, who now says that he was taken out of context. . . . "Some days I come in [and] I just don't want to see anyone black. I have just had it." . . . And it goes on to talk about his conduct with black students . . . and his general problems with having black students to teach.

Since I am aware that one of the major problems in education is that students learn when they have teachers who believe they can learn . . . if they have teachers who don't believe that the particular child they are teaching can learn, then the child is unlikely to learn anything. So I was very concerned, not about the article itself . . . but in particular if such a teacher was teaching children.

I didn't understand how they could learn anything from that teacher.[10]

The Commissioners discussed the article in terms of national education issues and concern about a general tendency of some individuals in

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5 Ibid., p. 53.

6 Ibid., p. 30.

7 Ibid., p. 31.

8 The author alleges that Bill Paterson, a social studies instructor, "tells the story of a former teacher, now retired, who moved to a small coastal island so he would never have to see another black face. 'I wish I could leave this year,' says Patterson. 'There are days I come here when I can hardly face it. I have to force myself.'" *Times* article, p. 31. Paterson denies making the comments attributed to him in the article. Students and faculty who remarked on Paterson's alleged comments all denied ever hearing him make such comments or express any negative sentiments about minority students. See comments in parts 3, 4, and 5 of this report.

9 *Times* article, p. 31.

10 Meeting of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Washington, DC, June 3, 1994, pp. 84–85.

educational institutions to express and hold negative racial and ethnic stereotypes. Berry proposed the Commission send letters to the Attorney General and Secretary of Education to investigate the district and determine if there were civil rights violations.[11]

In the discussion that followed it was suggested that in addition to such letters, the Illinois Advisory Committee be asked to monitor the situation at the high school. One Commissioner offered that it was probably the case that this type of situation, if accurate, "was not limited to one place in Chicago" and expressed an interest in broadening the issue.[12] Another Commissioner suggested the Commission first request the Illinois Advisory Committee examine the matter and offer some recommendations to the Commission.[13]

Following the Commission meeting, the Illinois Advisory Committee decided, by a vote of 12 yes and 1 no, to hold a community forum on race relations and equal education opportunity at Proviso West High School for the purpose of obtaining representative teacher, student, and parent perspectives concerning equal education opportunities and race relations at the school. The scope of the initiative was limited to a solicitation of opinion, without analysis of those opinions or an attempt to verify the factual content of either participant statements or the *Times* article.

Public meetings were held at Proviso West High School on the afternoon and evening of November 30, 1994, and on the afternoon of December 1, 1994. Students, faculty, administrators, parents, and individuals from the community spoke to the Advisory Committee. To avoid selection bias, student and faculty participants were randomly selected. All identified students and faculty cited in the *Times* article were invited to speak. In addition, a public session was held, at which anyone not specifically invited could testify. Comments from every individual who addressed the Advisory Committee are in this document.

Proviso West High School and Proviso Township High School District 209 cooperated completely with the Advisory Committee in this work. The school furnished meeting space to the Advisory Committee, allowed Advisory Committee members to tour the grounds and visit classes, provided school data, and coordinated and facilitated student and faculty participation.[14]

Part two of this report gives background and demographic information on the school, students, teachers, and community. Part three presents the comments from student participants; the comments are collected into two groups: students selected randomly and student leaders. Part four contains testimony from faculty and administrators; extensive coverage is given in this part to the remarks of the Proviso Township High School District superintendent Eric L. Eversley.[15]

Part five presents the statements of parents and individuals from the community. In part six are the Advisory Committee's observations and conclusions regarding race relations and equal educational opportunities at Proviso West High School.

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11 The letters, dated June 6, 1994, from Mary Frances Berry, Chairperson, USCCR, to the Attorney General and the Secretary of Education are in app. 2.

12 Ibid., p. 87, Commissioner Russell G. Redenbaugh.

13 Ibid., pp. 90–95, Commissioner Cruz Reynoso.

14 All students speaking to the Committee had permission from parents and/or guardians to participate at the meeting. The school provided logistical and administrative support to the Committee in contacting students, obtaining parental/guardian permission, and getting student participants to the meeting at the arranged times.

15 Pursuant to U.S. Commission on Civil Rights administrative procedure, a draft of the report was sent to Eric L. Eversley, superintendent, Proviso Township High School District 209, for review and comment.

Part 2

# Proviso West High School

Proviso West High School is in Illinois high school district 209. The Proviso high school township covers 6 square miles. The district has two high schools, Proviso East, located in Maywood, and Proviso West, located in Hillside. Each school has a multicultural population of approximately 2,300 students. The near western Chicago suburban communities of Bellwood, Berkeley, Hillside, Northlake, Stone Park, Westchester, and part of Melrose Park feed Proviso West High School.

The township high schools offer a complete college preparatory curriculum with advanced placement classes in the sciences and mathematics. Junior and senior honors interdisciplinary classes in English and social studies are available. Pre-Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and American College Test (ACT) preparation classes are held in the district each year. At Proviso West, project LIFT (Learning through the Integration of Familiar Themes) provides freshmen the opportunity to study academics as a series of interrelationships.

Funding for education in the State of Illinois has declined over the last two decades relative to the rest of the Nation. In the mid-1970s, Illinois ranked 28th in the Nation in providing State funds for education. At the end of the 1992–93 school year, Illinois ranked in the bottom five of the 50 States in providing money for public education. In addition, the State's share of education has decreased. Twenty years ago, Illinois paid 39.2 percent of the cost of education; in the early 1990s, the State paid 33.5 percent of the bill.[1]

In addition to funding concerns, Proviso West High School receives a freshman student body from the feeder elementary schools in which more than half of the students read below grade level. Results of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test administered in September 1994 to members of the Proviso West High School class of 1998 show 310 of the 573 (54 percent) ninth graders tested scored at grade 8 or below.[2]

## Student Background, Enrollment, and Achievement

### Racial/Ethnic Background and Enrollment

The racial and ethnic composition of the student body has changed over the last two decades. In 1970 the student population was almost

TABLE 2
Racial/Ethnic Background Rates and Total Enrollment

| | White | African Amer. | Hispanic | Asian Amer. | Native Amer. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Proviso West | 18.4 | 56.4 | 22.2 | 3.0 | 0.0 | 2,303 |
| District 209 | 11.8 | 69.3 | 16.5 | 2.3 | 0.0 | 4,427 |
| Illinois | 65.2 | 20.7 | 11.0 | 2.9 | 0.1 | |

Source: Proviso Township High School District 209, 1994 Report.

1 Proviso Township High School District 209, "Your High Schools Report," Winter/Spring 1994, p. 1.

2 Dale Crawford, memorandum to the superintendent, Dec. 16, 1994, Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR files.

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TABLE 3
Limited English Proficient and Low Income Student Rates

| | Limited English | Low income |
|---|---|---|
| Proviso West | 6.6 | 17.1 |
| District 209 | 3.5 | 22.7 |
| Illinois | 5.2 | 33.5 |

Source: Proviso Township High School District, 1994 Report.

exclusively white. In 1980 the student population was 3,252 and still predominately white: 2506 whites (77 percent), 457 African Americans (14 percent), 220 Hispanics (7 percent), and 69 Asians and American Indians (2 percent).[3] Today, the total student enrollment has dropped to 2,303, and white students are a numerical minority.

The enrollment at Proviso West for academic year 1993–94 was 2,303. African Americans are the majority of students, 56.4 percent of the total student population. Hispanics are the second largest group, 22.3 percent; whites are 18.4 percent of the student body; the Asian student population is 3 percent.[4]

Proviso West has a higher enrollment rate of students who are limited-English proficient than the State rate. The low-income rate at the school is below the State rate. Limited-English proficient students are those who have been found to be eligible for bilingual education. Low-income students are from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches.[5]

### Attendance

The school's dropout rate is higher than that found in the rest of the district and in Illinois. The dropout rate is based on the number of students in grades 9–12 who dropped out during the 1993–94 academic school year. The school's attendance rate, however, is higher than in the district, but lower than statewide. A perfect attendance rate (100 percent) means that all students attended school every day. No chronic truancy, defined as students absent from school without valid cause for 10 percent or more of the last 180 school days, was reported at Proviso West high school during the 1993–94 school year.[6]

TABLE 4
Attendance Rates, Dropout Rates, and Chronic Truancy

| | Attendance | Dropouts | Chronic truancy |
|---|---|---|---|
| Proviso West | 91.7 | 9.3 | 0 |
| District 209 | 90.7 | 7.7 | 20 |
| Illinois | 93.2 | 7.0 | NA |

Source: Proviso Township High School District 209, 1994 Report.

3 Proviso Township High School District 209.

4 Proviso Township High School District 209, 1994 School Report Card, p. 2 (hereafter referred to as 1994 Report). Data for the 1993–94 academic year data is used to comport with school data at time of the *Times* article.

5 1994 Report, p. 2.

6 Ibid., p. 2.

TABLE 5
Graduation Rates

| | |
|---|---|
| Proviso West | 76.6 |
| District 209 | 71.1 |
| Illinois | 78.0 |

Source: Proviso Township High School District, 1994 Report.

### Graduation Rate

The graduation rate at Proviso West High School for the 1993–94 academic year (76.6 percent) is essentially equivalent to the State graduation rate (78.0 percent). The graduation rate compares the number of students who enrolled in ninth grade in the fall of 1990 with the number from that group who actually graduated in 1994. Adjustments to the rate are made for students who transferred in and out of the school. The graduation rate does not include students who graduated in the summer of 1994 or those who took more than 4 years to graduate.[7]

### Standardized Achievement Testing

The Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) test is administered to all students in the State during their sophomore year in reading, mathematics, and writing, and all students in their junior year in science and social science. Average IGAP scores in reading, mathematics, science, and social science are reported on 0–500 scale; scores for writing are on a 6–32 scale.

The percentage of those tested at Proviso West was generally higher than the rate of students tested statewide. Sophomores at Proviso West scored at the State average in writing and below the State average in reading and mathematics. Juniors at Proviso West scored lower than the State average in science and social science.[8]

### College Testing

Prospective college students at Proviso West take the ACT. ACT scores range from 1 (lowest) to 36 (highest). Proviso West students scored lower when compared to all students in Illinois taking the ACT for the academic year 1993–94. The composite score for Proviso West students is 18.1,

TABLE 6
IGAP Average Scores for Reading, Mathematics, Writing, Science, and Social Science

| | Reading | | Mathematics | | Writing | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Score | % Tested | Score | % Tested | Score | % Tested |
| Proviso West | 210 | 80.7 | 201 | 82.2 | 25.3 | 79.1 |
| District 209 | 186 | 81.7 | 190 | 80.4 | 24.1 | 74.8 |
| Illinois | 244 | 81.9 | 254 | 81.3 | 25.3 | 78.9 |

| | Science | | Social Science | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Score | % Tested | Score | % Tested |
| Proviso West | 210 | 86.2 | 199 | 87.4 |
| District 209 | 201 | 76.8 | 185 | 79.8 |
| Illinois | 256 | 82.9 | 245 | 83.6 |

Source: Proviso Township High School District 209, 1994 Report.

7 Ibid., p. 5.

8 Ibid.

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TABLE 7
American College Testing Scores, 1993-94

| | ACT—All students | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Score | Band | Test taker % |
| Proviso West | 18.1 | 17.6-18.6 | 66.6 |
| District 209 | 18.0 | 17.6-18.4 | 63.0 |
| Illinois | 21.0 | * | 62.4 |

| | ACT—Students who completed core program | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Score | Band | Test taker % |
| Proviso West | 19.2 | 18.4-20.0 | 26.3 |
| District 209 | 19.4 | 18.7-20.1 | 23.8 |
| Illinois | 22.9 | * | 27.5 |

* State score bands are not shown because they are very narrow.

Source: Proviso Township High School District 209, 1994 Report.

with a score band of 17.6–18.6; the composite ACT score for all students in the State was 21.0.

Score bands can be used to compare composite scores. If the score for the State falls within the score band for a school, then there is no significant difference between the school score and the State score. However, if the State score is outside the score band for the school, then there is significant difference between the school score and the State score.

Students at Proviso West who had completed a core high school program also scored lower on the ACT than similar students in the State. A core program is a high school program that includes at least 4 years of English and at least 3 years of mathematics, social studies, and natural sciences. Generally, students who complete core programs earn higher average scores than those who had less than core programs. Students at Proviso West who completed a high school core program had a composite score of 19.2 compared to a composite score of 22.9 for students in the State who completed a core program. A higher percentage of students at Proviso West took the ACT (66.6 percent) than the statewide average (62.4 percent). The rate of test taking for students at Proviso West who completed a core high school program was 26.3 percent, compared to 27.5 percent of similar students in the State.[9]

## Teacher Background, Tenure, and Class Size

### Racial/Ethnic Diversity

At the start of the 1993–94 academic year there were 144 teachers at Proviso West. Teachers include all school personnel whose primary responsibility is listed as that of classroom teacher on the State Teacher Service Record file.[10] The race/ethnicity of the faculty is: 125 white (86.8 percent), 16 African American (11.1 percent), 2 Hispanic (1.4 percent), and 1 Native American (0.7 percent).

Recent hiring rates have a similar race and ethnic composition. For the 1993–94 academic year, 19 teachers were hired including: 16 whites (85 percent), 2 African Americans (10 percent),

9 Ibid., p. 7.

10 Ibid., p. 3.

TABLE 8
Teacher Racial/Ethnic Background

| | White | African Amer. | Hispanic | Asian Amer. | Native Amer. | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Proviso West | 86.8 | 11.1 | 1.4 | 0.0 | 0.7 | 144 |
| District 209 | 86.1 | 12.0 | 1.1 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 266 |
| Illinois | 84.5 | 12.5 | 2.4 | 0.6 | 0.1 | NA |

Source: Proviso Township High School District 209, 1994 Report.

TABLE 9
Mean Teacher Experience

| | |
|---|---|
| Proviso West | 15.7 years |
| District 209 | 17.2 years |
| HS Districts | 17.5 years |
| Illinois | 15.4 years |

Source: Proviso Township High School District 209, 1994 Report.

and 1 Hispanic (5 percent). For the 1994–95 school year, 27 teachers were hired including: 23 whites (85 percent), 2 African Americans (7.5 percent), and 2 Hispanics (7.5 percent).

These hiring rates, though lower than the race and ethnicity rates of the student population, exceed the hiring rates of minority secondary teachers in Illinois. In the period July–August 1993, the race and ethnic ratios of new secondary teacher hires were: 96.1 percent white, 2.7 percent African American, 0.9 percent Hispanic, and 0.3 percent Asian.[11]

## Salary

The average teacher salary in high school district 209 for the 1993–94 academic year was $53,788, essentially equivalent to the average salary for all high school districts in Illinois, $54,068. The district average salary is slightly lower in comparison to other large-size high school districts in the State, which is $59,490. The average teacher salary in Illinois for the same period for all teachers was $39,545. Teacher salaries include various monetary benefits and compensation such as tax-sheltered annuities, retirement benefits, and extracurricular duty pay.[12]

TABLE 10
Teacher Salary and Per Pupil Cost

| | Teacher salary 1993-94 | Cost per pupil 1992-93 |
|---|---|---|
| District 209 | $53,788 | $8,786 |
| Type* | $54,068 | $8,518 |
| Size** | $59,490 | $9,592 |
| Illinois | $39,545 | $5,579 |

* Average for all high school districts in Illinois.
** Average for all large high school districts in Illinois.
Source: Proviso Township High School District 209, 1994 Report.

## Class Size

Average class size at Proviso West High School (21.8) was slightly higher than the average high school class size in Illinois (19.9) for the 1993–94 academic year. Average class size is the total enrollment for a grade divided by the number of classes for that grade reported for the first school

11 Illinois Department of Education, department of teacher certification.

12 Ibid., p. 4.

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TABLE 11
Class Size

| | |
|---|---|
| Proviso West | 21.6 |
| District 209 | 21.4 |
| Illinois | 19.9 |

Source: Proviso Township High School District 209, 1994 Report.

day in May. For high schools, the average class size is computed for the whole school, based on average class sizes for the second and fifth periods.[13]

## School Discipline

African American students have the largest suspension rate in the school district. Multiple suspensions were given to 1,150 students in the district during the 1993–94 academic year: 894 African American students (77.7 percent), 174 Hispanic students (15.0 percent), 73 white students (6.3 percent), and 9 Asian students (1 percent). Eight hundred sixty-two (862) students in the district were suspended once and only once: 636 African American students (73.8 percent), 141 Hispanic students (16.3 percent), 77 white students (8.9 percent), and 8 Asian students (1 percent).

Suspension rates at Proviso West High School are similar to the district figures. Multiple suspensions were given to 751 students at Proviso West High School during the 1993–94 academic year: 536 African American students (71.4 percent), 143 Hispanic students (19.0 percent), 66 white students (8.8 percent), and 6 Asian students (0.8 percent). Four hundred and seventy-four (474) students at Proviso West were suspended once and only once: 290 African American students (61.2 percent), 113 Hispanic students (23.8 percent), 64 white students (13.5 percent), and 7 Asian students (1.5 percent).

The racial and ethnic breakdown of the total 1,225 suspensions during the 1993–94 academic year is: 826 African Americans (67.4 percent), 256 Hispanics (20.9 percent), 130 whites (10.6 percent), and 13 Asians (1.1 percent).

TABLE 12
School Suspensions by Race and Ethnicity

| Students suspended once and only once | Number | Group rate |
|---|---|---|
| African American | 290 | 61.2% |
| White | 64 | 13.5 |
| Hispanic | 113 | 23.8 |
| Asian | 7 | 1.5 |

| Students suspended more than once | Number | Group rate |
|---|---|---|
| African American | 536 | 71.4% |
| White | 66 | 8.8% |
| Hispanic | 143 | 19.0% |
| Asian | 6 | 0.8% |

Source: Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR, from Illinois State Board of Education and Proviso West High School data.

13 Ibid., p. 3.

Part 3

# Student Comments

Forty-five students made statements about race relations and equal education opportunity at Proviso West High School. The student selection process was designed to produce an accurate representation of student opinion concerning the school's racial climate and educational opportunities. Two groups of students were selected: a random sample of 30 students and a random selection of 12 student leaders. Three other students volunteered to speak to the Advisory Committee.[1]

The random sample of student participants was generated from a list of student identification numbers active at the start of the 1994–95 school year. Forty-five student numbers were selected, the last 15 selected for use as alternates. Nine of the alternates were used, substituting for 6 students who had left Proviso West and 3 students who could not be interviewed. School policy required all selected student participants to have a signed permission slip from a parent or guardian before speaking to the Advisory Committee. Nineteen of the students in the random sample did not provide parental/guardian permission at the time of the meeting, and were interviewed at a later date by Commission staff.[2]

The random sample closely resembled the race and ethnicity of the student population. The racial/ethnic composition of the student population is: 56.4 percent African American, 22.2 percent Hispanic, 18.4 percent white, and 3.0 percent Asian. The racial/ethnic composition of the random sample is: 18 African American (60 percent), 6 Hispanic (20.0 percent), 5 white (16.7 percent), and 1 Asian (3.3 percent).

The statements of the students are presented without comment, letting the students' words speak for themselves. The testimony of some students before the Advisory Committee is condensed, while the remarks of others, due to their brevity, are presented in entirety.[3]

## Selected Student Leaders

George Acevedo, class of 1995:

I would just like to say that when talking about racism I feel that everyone has a certain degree of racism, but when it comes to society, whether it be in school or in community, I feel that it can be greatly exaggerated. From the *New York Times [Magazine]* article that came out in May, I felt that that was greatly exaggerated and I just wanted to point that out. I think we are more proud [of our school] because we have ethnic diversity.[4]

Brandi Armstrong, class of 1995:

What I have experienced at this school is called prejudice not racism. . . . I personally have experienced racial prejudice towards me, but you have to look at things like this [with the understanding] that somebody is

1 Opportunity was provided to all students to participate, either by making statements directly to the Committee during public sessions or by providing written comments to the Committee through the Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR.

2 The 19 students ultimately provided parental/guardian permission and were interviewed by staff from the Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR. Records of the interviews are in the files of the Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR, Chicago, IL. Two students did not want their statements made public.

3 Student comments presented in their entirety are denoted by "".

4 Testimony before the Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 1994, Proviso West High School, Hillside, IL, p. 71 (hereafter referred to as Transcript). George Acevedo participates in varsity school athletics, other student organizations, and is a member of the National Honor Society.

TABLE 13
Student Leader Participants

| Name | Activity |
|---|---|
| George Acevedo | Athletics |
| Brandi Armstrong | Athletics |
| Clarise Bennett | Student council |
| Kizzy Elem | Class president |
| Hilda Farah | Student council |
| Zachary Hudson | Class president |
| Manui McCullough | Student council |
| Kelly Morgan | Athletics |
| Carolyn Moss | Class secretary |
| Jesus Reyes | Athletics |
| Heidi Schulz | Athletics |
| Lorie Sojak | Student council |

always going to dislike you for various reasons, you cannot stop that. . . .

The problem that I perceive is prejudice, not only at my school but also at times in my community. Of myself, I have bumped into someone and I am short and black. And if I bump into someone that is of an Hispanic or maybe of a Caucasian or someone of an Asian [ethnicity], they might automatically think I'll get an attitude . . . and I am not like that at all. That's just a stereotype.[5]

Clarise Bennett, class of 1996:

I have never encountered any racial problems at Proviso West, not during my 3 years here. As for other groups, I don't have a problem with any racial group. . . . I don't think there is a magnitude to the [race] problem because I think everything is blown out of proportion. There are race problems, but no more than there are in any other schools in any district. . . .

[The *Times* article blew the race problem here] out of proportion. It was wrong . . . that everything that was good or fair about the school was not mentioned. They only mentioned stuff that was negative and the few things that are negative, [the author] made into a huge deal. There was no positive, just negative.[6]

Kizzy Elem, class of 1996:

I think there will always be racism, but I don't think there is much racism at [this] school. In the past there have been fights with different races. And some people say things. Like last year we had "niggers" [written] on the walls and on the lockers. . . . And in the classrooms people talk about each other, but it is not that much. . . .

In the [lunchroom] there was a time where the white students would be on one side, the black people would be on the other side. They mixed together sometimes. . . . Sometimes they know each other.[7]

Hilda Farah, class of 1995:

At our school in my eyes I don't see any race relations [problems]. I mean sure we have majority black and Hispanic, [but] in my classes, in the halls, and in the lunchrooms I don't see any racial discrimination. . . .

[The article] was blown way out of proportion. It did not respect what our school represents at all. When we first heard of this reporter coming into our school, we thought he was going to make it a real positive issue. He even said so, and he went and just back faced us. He took parts out of quotes and made them look negative which I don't think was right . . . I was in that American studies class which he studied very carefully. And our whole class was mad . . . about the remarks that were made in the [article].[8]

Zachary Hudson, class of 1997:

For our school I don't see any prejudice at all. I get along with everybody and everybody tends to like me and I tend to do what I have to do. . . . I feel like if you

5 Ibid., pp. 74 and 77. Brandi Armstrong is an honor student, a member of the school's track, basketball, and volleyball teams, and also a student tutor.

6 Ibid., pp. 17 and 19. Clarise Bennett is president of the student council and involved in other school activities.

7 Ibid., pp. 47–48 and 51–52. Kizzy Elem is president of her class and a member of the school's varsity basketball team.

8 Ibid., pp. 32 and 34. Hilda Farah is on the executive board of the student council.

come here, come respectful and [act] in a respectable manner and do what you are supposed to do, people will respect you. I never had any trouble with anyone and I don't see any kind of prejudice here because I am very respectful and I give respect and to a certain extent I get respect. . . .

Everybody gets along as far as I see. For what I see we come here, have a good time. . . . You are going to run into some negativity, [and some] people try to get you in trouble or something like that, [but] you have that everywhere.[9]

Manui Ann McCullough, class of 1995:

There are problems [here]. I know there are definitely some problems between other people here . . . but I don't have any problems with anybody. I get along with almost everybody. . . .

As student council members, our job is to try and get [problems] stopped and get the students involved and get everyone together. And we are working really hard this year and we have done a lot of things to get school involvement in school spirit and people together. We worked a lot harder this year trying to make things stop, but it has gotten gradually worse as the years go on. . . .

It is a totally different atmosphere here than at another school. But it is also more of an atmosphere in which you get to relate to more people and more cultures and everything. So you get to know other people and get to understand them better.[10]

Kelly Morgan, class of 1996:

I myself feel that there are no race relation [problems] at this school. I feel that we are all here for one purpose, to learn, and any problems that arise from that aspect is mainly out of ignorance and from people that aren't here to learn, they just don't want to deal with the aspect of education. So there are really no race relation [problems]; everything is of a one-on-one contact with people. . . .

I would say a majority of [the student body] would agree with what I've just said just because most of the people here are open minded about their community and this school, and we do take pride in Proviso West.[11]

Carolyn Moss, class of 1995:

My views on race relations [at Proviso is] there are a variety of races at Proviso and there is . . . racism—not a lot of racism, but there is [some] in the school as in other high schools and I feel it cannot be [eliminated]. . . . Not everyone agrees to the same things and certain . . . minds aren't as open as other people's are. . . .

Ewing: What specific practices would you like to see removed from the school grounds?

Moss: The fighting. The fighting I would like to be gone. The negative images of how much racism there is in this school [comes from this and] there is not that much. People or students from other high schools tend to look down at Proviso West because of that and they don't know the [entire] story, the true stories . . . behind the stories that are in the newspapers.[12]

Jesus Reyes, class of 1996:

My opinion is that if you are walking down the hall and you bump into somebody, you might get a race comment or something. But like if you are in sports [there is no problem]. I'm in wrestling and soccer and wrestling is mostly black and I get along fine. . . . I get along with black people, white people, Hispanics, Asians. . . . But I'm a junior [and] my freshman and sophomore year I did hear a couple of racial comments.[13]

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9 Ibid., pp. 33 and 38. Zachary Hudson is president of the class of 1997 and on the executive board of the student council.

10 Ibid., pp. 41, 45, 46. Manui McCullough is a senior and secretary of the student council.

11 Ibid., p. 79. Kelly Morgan is a member of the school band, newspaper, key club, and the swimming and soccer teams.

12 Ibid., pp. 62 and 65. Carolyn Moss is secretary of the senior class.

13 Ibid., p. 29.

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Heidi Schulz, class of 1995:

There are race problems [here], yes, and no, there aren't problems. Each group of friends is different. There are black friends who like white people, white people who like black people. Like for me, I was on the track team. I was the only white person sometimes or one of the few. We got along great, absolutely nothing at all. Then you go in the hallways and sometimes there are problems. But then again there are others who don't give you problems, who don't say racial slurs if somebody knocks you in the hallway. The [race] problems exist, but then they don't as well.

Yandle: Are the issues addressed in [*The New York Times Magazine*] article or the things reported in that article . . . overexaggerated or is there any factual basis?

Schulz: There is some truth. I would say 75 percent of it is blown out of proportion, but yes, problems do exist and we can't, I can't, say that they do not and that this is a great place.[14]

Lorie Sojak, class of 1995:

I don't have any problems with the race relations here. I mean there are people who are ignorant, but that is any race. . . . I have a lot of black friends, white friends, Hispanic friends, whatever. . . .

I think Proviso is a good school. I don't consider race relations a problem [here].[15]

## Students Selected by Random Sample

Bernada Baker,* class of 1998:

I have never had any racial situations. It's fine here. I don't have any problems. It's a nice school and I am doing better here than at my previous school because my teachers are enforcing the work.[16]

Lillian Barbari,* class of 1998:

I think everything is fine here. No one is racist here. Maybe because the majority of the school is black, people who do not go here think it is a problem. But everything is okay.[17]

Katia Becerra,* class of 1997:

Everyone gets along here. Once in awhile there are fights, but those are personality issues, and it's African Americans against African Americans and Hispanics against Hispanics, for instance. The teachers I know are not racist. I have heard rumors of racist teachers but I have not had an experience with prejudice from a teacher.[18]

William Brown,* class of 1998:

It's fine with me. The school is fine. The teachers are nice. Everything is okay.[19]

Shane Clarke,* class of 1996:

I feel students are more racial here than the faculty. The kids move in segregated groups. Me and my friends are sometimes called "white boys" by the black students particularly when we sit at our own table at lunch. I don't think it is more than that. I feel there is a problem of racism here and it should be dealt with. I feel like a minority here. The school is a great place to get an education but it should be more united. If we got rid of

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14 Ibid., pp. 25 and 30.

15 Ibid., pp. 41 and 46. Lorie Sojak is a senior and treasurer of the student council.

16 Interview, Dec. 15, 1995, Proviso West High School, Hillside, IL, Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR files (hereafter referred to as Interview).

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

the racism there would be more spirit. Like at dances, the whites don't attend because of the music.[20]

Henry Alexander Day, class of 1997:

Some people think [there are racial problems at Proviso West] and some people think there aren't. In my opinion I really think it is not; because it is just in the minds of certain people that there may be racial [problems] in this school, but to me it is really not.[21]

Laura Deyo,* class of 1998:

I think it is okay here. It's all right with all the races. There is each race here, black, white, Mexican. It's fun to get to know all of them. I like to make friends with all the people here.[22]

Sandra Franco, class of 1995:

I think, for me, I have never had a racial problem. . . . I don't think there is a lot of racial problems here. . . .

Roberts: Did you have any fears of coming here?

Franco: No, [at first] I thought I was going to be the only Hispanic. But I did not . . . hear anything negative. . . .

Mathewson: Could you compare your earlier experience at [West Lyden] with your experience at Proviso West?

Franco: I like it better here because I have more opportunities. . . .

Schwartzberg: In the cafeteria do students tend to sit separately?

Franco: Sometimes, [but] nothing happens [if that is broken] because we just move to another table or we sit there at the same table.[23]

Kevin Gill,* class of 1996:

TABLE 14
Student Participants

| Name | Race/ethnicity |
|---|---|
| Bernada Baker° | African American |
| Lillian Barbari° | Hispanic |
| Katia Becerra° | Hispanic |
| William Brown° | African American |
| Shane Clark° | White |
| Henry Alexander Day | African American |
| Laura Deyo° | White |
| Sandra Franco | Hispanic |
| Kevin Gill° | African American |
| Tanesha Griggs° | African American |
| Ayanna Hannah° | African American |
| Nancy Kernan | White |
| Jason Knight° | African American |
| Jeffrey Langeland° | White |
| John Marszaleck | White |
| Garrett Matthews° | African American |
| Octavia McCadd° | African American |
| Chevon Nightengale | African American |
| Maribel Pinedo | Hispanic |
| Severin Richardson | African American |
| Anu Saini | Asian American |
| Terrence Spencer | African American |
| Jason Stewart° | African American |
| Rekida Thomas° | African American |
| Myra Tidwell | African American |
| Sugar Wright | African American |
| Marco Vargas° | Hispanic |
| Esther Vega° | Hispanic |

Students in this table are those selected by random sample. Two students making statements did not want to be identified or have their statements made public.
° Students giving statements subsequent to the community forum.

20 Ibid.

21 Transcript, p. 308.

22 Ibid.

23 Transcript, pp. 313, 314, 315, and 316.

Well, to me, I think that some people in this school are prejudiced. They don't show it to me, but I see it, it's there. People, if you ask them if they are prejudiced, will deny it, but I can see it's there by the way they act. I never knew it was here at first, but last year I ran into it for the first time. The teachers are okay, though, no problems there.[24]

Tanesha Griggs, class of 1998:

I don't know about any racism here.[25]

Ayana Hannah,* class of 1996:

I think everything is okay because it is normal here. I feel I get along with a lot of different races. I went to school previously where there were all kinds of people. Here the people I see in the hallways get along; there is no race problem. It is a nice school and teachers are good. I have never had a situation where teachers treated me or anyone else unfairly because of color.[26]

Nancy Kernan, class of 1998:

I do not think there is a racial problem [here]. I have never heard any comments from any teachers or any students relating to racial problems. There is none. And I don't think the newspaper article did justice. It just wrote bad things about West which were untrue....

It is mostly people that don't go here that say things about [us] because they don't know what really goes on here. They think that it's a bad situation because it's [got] a lot of black people and Mexicans. But it's not bad at all.[27]

Jason Knight,* class of 1997:

The race situation is better here than at other schools I have been to. This is my first year here after being at another high school. The people get along better here. There is not much tension here. It is just different here.

You do get along easier with your own race, and by my going to Proviso West, where it is mostly African American, it's easier for me than at the other school I went to which was mostly white.[28]

Jeffrey Langeland,* class of 1996:

I don't think the problems here are racial. It's like any other school, the school's problems are not racist, but gang problems. Overall the school is okay.[29]

John Marszaleck, class of 1997:

I am a sophomore here and I really don't think there is any racial problem here. This is my second year and it seems pretty fine. I like the school and everything is fine.... I'm in plays here at the school and work with blacks, whites, and everybody. And we just come together where you don't think about race.[30]

Garrett Matthews,* class of 1995:

I have no racism problem here with any of my teachers. I'm not saying [though] that there aren't any racism problems at Proviso West High School.[31]

Octavia McCadd, class of 1997:

I have never seen a lot of racism at the school. I haven't had any racism shown toward myself personally. The school is all right. I am getting my education and see others getting their education. Teachers try their best and will give help to students if they want it. If there is anything racist, teachers will discipline the student or

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24 Interview, Dec. 15, 1994.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Transcript, pp. 289 and 292.

28 Interview, Dec. 15, 1994.

29 Ibid.

30 Transcript, pp. 290 and 291.

31 Written comment in response to verification of original interview statement made on Dec. 15, 1994.

show them it wasn't the way to act. The teachers do not show any racism at this school.[32]

Chevon Nightengale, class of 1995:

I feel that people at this school keep to themselves, like different races stay in different groups. Different groups like Puerto Ricans and Hispanics and whoever, blacks or whatever, stay in separate groups. So it is not really like bonding together.

For myself I feel that I make friends with all races and stuff because that is the type of person I am [but] . . . I witness [this when I] walk through the halls and notice that different groups are in different groups with the same kinds of people. I guess it is because if you are in the same cultural group, you have the same things in common with the other people. So they just stick together. I feel they can't open their minds to other cultures.

I understand that some of the black students, upperclassmen, some of them, . . . are disruptive. But they are not given a chance as ones that want to learn something. Mostly they pay more attention to the white kids. . . . That's what I see.

Yandle: Have you experienced or observed things you felt were motivated by racial prejudice or racism?

Nightengale: Well, yes. When I was in my freshman year I was on the softball team, and for some reason I don't feel that, I'm not going to say any names, but the coach of the softball team mostly played the white students that were on the team instead of the blacks. It was like one black was playing. I noticed that when I had tried out before for the softball team. That's mostly it. . . .[33]

Maribel Pinedo, class of 1995:

I don't see any discrimination or anything like that [at Proviso].[34]

Severin Richardson, class of 1995:

In the time I have been here, I haven't seen any racism . . . in this school. . . . I haven't seen any really racial conflict, but at [my previous school] Lakeview, it was a gang problem and it was blacks against Puerto Ricans.[35]

Anu Saini, class of 1998:

Lyon: Do you believe that anybody has picked on you because of your race or culture?

Saini: Yes, some boys in my class.

Lyon: What types of things do they say or do?

Saini: They call me names and stuff because of my religion.

Lyon: And when this happens what do you do?

Saini: I just go tell the teacher [and] they get in trouble.[36]

Terrence Spencer, class of 1995:

This is my first year here and since I have been here I haven't seen nothing too much racial going on. There's more blacks and Hispanics here, but there is really no difference. . . .

Scales: In the group of African Americans . . . is that group mixed in terms of the community?

Spencer: It's not like we just hang out solely with black folks over here, Mexicans over here, whites over there. If we feel like talking to somebody, we converse . . . It's

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32 Interview.

33 Transcript, pp. 301–02, and 304–05.

34 Ibid., p. 313.

35 Ibid., pp. 318–20, and 323.

36 Ibid., p. 297.

not like I don't like you because you're Mexican; nothing like that. We talk to everybody.[37]

Jason Stewart,* class of 1996:

This school does not have much racism to my knowledge. If there is it's the paraprofessional staff.[38] If a black person walks down the hallway, they will ask for their pass. But I know of situations where, for instance, a white female walked down the hallway, no pass in her hand, and she was not asked for a pass. As for my teachers, if they have racism inside, they don't show it.[39]

Rekida Thomas,* class of 1998:

I don't think there is racism here. I have only been here for a few months, but I don't hear anybody saying anything racist. The school is fair to me. I like high school and I like this school.[40]

Myra Tidwell, class of 1995:

I don't feel that there is a big racism problem here. I mean there is always going to be people who don't like you for their certain reasons. It may be because of your skin color. There are people here just like there are people at other high schools . . . that are going to be like that and there is nothing you can do to change their point of view of you. But most of the problems we have at Proviso don't stem from race problems, it stems from one-on-one people having disagreements with each other, not with their race itself and sometimes it gets blown out of proportion. People look at it the wrong way and that is what they see, but it is not like that all the time.[41]

Marco Vargas,* class of 1995:

I think there is no racism here. The [*New York Times Magazine*] article's headline, "We're All Racist Now," is not true for me, and it is not true.[42]

Esther Vega,* class of 1995:

I think that there are a variety of cultures at Proviso West High School. Some students try to ignore it, but when the newspaper article came out, blacks were upset, Hispanics were upset, but the whites were not talking. I had Mr. Paterson for class. I know him and the things said about him in the article were taken out of proportion. Some other students, though, who had never had him were influenced about him by the media.

I ran for homecoming queen this year and I felt I would be booed at the assembly because I was Hispanic. As it turned out I was not booed and I won. As I became more aware of student attitudes, I felt more support from lots of different students. Students expressed feelings to me and I got a lot of good feedback.

I never have felt any prejudice here. I have African American and Caucasian friends. I feel individual problems of racism exist at Proviso, but there is not an overall race problem at Proviso West. I have never been exposed to prejudice here. If I was I would not recognize it [as a school problem], but would feel it was an individual problem. Anybody can achieve whatever they want here at this school. You can't blame it on your culture or color.[43]

Sugar Wright, class of 1995:

The only problem I have, really I don't have a problem, I mean with green or black, the only problem I have is the school rules. I feel black students make it hard for themselves by doing bad things. [There is a] rule . . . [about] if you miss a certain amount of days. Some students would like to graduate on time and the [rules]

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37 Ibid., pp. 318–19 and 321–22.

38 The paraprofessional staff is security and hall monitors.

39 Interview, Dec. 15, 1994.

40 Ibid.

41 Transcript, pp. 62–63.

42 Interview, Dec. 15, 1994.

43 Ibid.

are making it harder for some students to do that. If you are late to first period you can't get in the classroom; you have to go to the cafeteria. If you miss 8 days, [or] are late 8 days, you won't be able to get a grade. That's the only problem I have.[44]

## Volunteer Student Comments

Kim Lasky, class of 1995:

I was interviewed by Mr. Bissinger for the *New York Times* article and I did say that "We're all racist now." I am not going to deny that I made that comment. But Mr. Bissinger took it out of context and did not include the rest of it which made all the difference in the world. After I said that, I went on to say that I wasn't particularly talking about blacks, I wasn't talking about whites, I wasn't talking about Hispanics. I was saying that everybody takes a part in racism.

There is racism at Proviso, but there is racism everywhere you go. Mr. Bissinger chose to ignore that fact . . . and made me look like I was saying all white people are racist at Proviso. That was not what I was getting at, at all. . . . My parents gave me the option of where I wanted to attend school and I chose Proviso. If I were a racist, I would not be here. . . .

Maybe I should have used the word prejudice, because everybody has someone they don't like. Everyone has different opinions about different people. So maybe I should have used the word prejudice, because I know that racism means hating an entire group of people.

[When I said "we're all racist now"] I meant that people tended to separate in their own groups, and in doing so they are—in a way—racist, because like everybody has said so far, that's the way it is at Proviso: the blacks mostly hang out with the blacks, the whites hang out with the whites, Hispanics hang out with the Hispanics. It is either that way or it is the students in the honors classes hang out with the kids in their classes. . . .

[Racism] is not a big problem at [Proviso]. Mr. Bissinger made the whole article out that that was the only problem we have here and that there were no good things at Proviso. When my family and I talked to him, we made sure that he knew that we were the biggest supporters of Proviso . . . and he just chose to ignore all that.[45]

Jeff VanderMolen, class of 1995:

I happen to be editor-in-chief of the paper here at Proviso and the following month after the article came out I had my letter to the editor published in the *New York Times Magazine*.[46] [I wrote] because it . . . disturbed me to read [the article].

We had a meeting of our [newspaper] staff the month after, actually the next day after it came out, and we all came to the conclusion that none of the people quoted in the article were called back to have their quotations checked, even Mr. Paterson. . . . And I know for a fact that the young lady that was quoted for the headline ["We're all racist now"] was not called back. So she was totally misquoted and her quotes are taken out of context.

That was totally wrong. He turned her words all around. She may have said those words, but not altogether in one complete sentence. He turned it all around and made it seem like she said that.[47]

Jim Redden, class of 1995:

I have not seen too much racism personally. Nobody calls me names and I don't call anyone names. It is pretty cool here. There may be other students for whom this is not true, but for me I have no problems, and there are no racial fights or racial namecalling.

The [*Times*] article was stretched. There is a race problem here, but there is a race problem everywhere. I don't think Proviso is as bad as he [*Bissinger*] said it was.[48]

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44 Transcript, p. 307.

45 Transcript, pp. 329, 330, 331, and 334.

46 Jeff VanderMolen's letter is in app. 3.

47 Transcript, pp. 228–29, and 231.

48 Interview, Dec. 15, 1995.

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Part 4

# Faculty and Staff Comments

Seventeen faculty and staff gave testimony on the racial climate and equal educational opportunity at Proviso West High School. Fifteen of the presenters were randomly selected from a list of faculty and staff; two others volunteered to speak. Two of the faculty included in the sample had been quoted in the *Times Magazine* article.[1] Seven of the faculty and staff originally selected declined to speak to the Advisory Committee and were replaced by alternate faculty/staff selections.

The final list of faculty/staff included the departments: business education (1), english (4), guidance (4), library (1) physical education (2), paraprofessional staff (1), social studies (1), and special education (2). One assistant superintendent and one school social worker also testified.

In addition, Eric L. Eversley, Ed.D., superintendent of Proviso Township High School district 209; Leo Banks, president, board of education, Proviso Township High School district; and C. Rebecca Montoya, Ed.D., principal of Proviso West High School made presentations. Opportunity was also extended to the faculty members quoted in the *Times Magazine* article to either speak directly to the Advisory Committee or submit written statements.

## Administration

Eric L. Eversley, Ed.D., superintendent:

The publication of the *New York Times Magazine* article . . . created a firestorm of reaction and that reaction continues. Most of the reaction centered around several racially offensive comments which were attributed to individuals and generalized by some to be reflective of the attitude or perspectives of all district employees. That generalization . . . is wrong and it misrepresents our school and our school district.

Whether those racially offensive comments were made or not, I cannot say. That is a matter known to the individuals to whom the comments are attributed, to the author of the article, and to the Almighty. To the extent that those comments reflect the feelings of any individual in our district or to the extent that they would lead to discriminatory behaviors on the part of any individual, they are unacceptable, they are intolerable, and they will not be supported by the school district. I stated that position at the time of the article's publication, and I reiterate it here for you today. [At the time] the article appeared . . . I stated a position which is still a position I maintain. . . . I would like to read a portion of that communication to the faculty and the staff of our school district.

"While we may all have our own personal disappointments with the article, I encourage that we not dismiss it. To do so would cause us to miss an opportunity for personal and organizational introspection, organizational development, and personal and professional growth. I trust that it is no surprise to you that I am distressed by images of students not being constructively engaged in instruction. I am concerned about even any suspicion that our work with students is driven by low expectations or negative perspectives about our students as human beings.

"Clearly our school environment, our institutional operations, and the behavior of adults and students must be free from the harmful effect of bias, including racism and sexism. We will never be the school district of excellence if we allow bias to place artificial limits on us. To the extent that bias, prejudice, and discrimination exists, the intellectual and social development of our students as well as the personal and professional development of our staff will be needlessly restricted.

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1 Alexis Wallace and Patricia Berent are faculty members at Proviso West High School who were quoted in the *New York Times Magazine* article, "We're all racist now."

We will all suffer because of these restrictions and limitations. . . ."

I would like to make a second point about the article. For those without experience, that is to say firsthand experience, with our school and our staff, for those who know our school only through rumor and innuendo, the article is unrepresentative of the full reality of Proviso West. The author indicated the article is about 9,800 words which were selected from several times that number which were written for the piece. I am disappointed that those words selected did not speak to the district, faculty, and staff inservice initiatives in the area of cultural diversity in 1992 [and] 1993. . . . [and] to the feelings of white parents who have constructive things to say about our school. . . .

I do have a couple of other concerns about the article. The first is any implication in the article which casts any doubt about the interest of our students in learning or the intellectual capacity of our students in general, or African American students in particular. That is the kind of garbage . . . to which people of color are subjected on a very regular basis. And whether it is Jencks or Coleman or Murray and Hernstein or other pseudo-scientific approaches, they do great harm. . . .

The second is an implication that one might draw from the article, perhaps from the title, when a large concentration of white residents leave a community, that somehow, the community is thereby flawed. I do not see our parents as flawed. I clearly do not see our students as flawed. . . .

Racism, bias, and discrimination are not produced at the school. They are functions operating in our society at large that can be played out in any private or public enterprise or institution, including private or public schools. Race-based bias and troublesome behavior that springs from it is a tragic historic part of American life. There is permanence to it, as Derrick Bell so eloquently and effectively stated in his 1992 book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well.*

Given that racism and bias exist in our society . . . whether it is housing, access to capital, or employment, and given that all of us are . . . influenced by it to a greater or lesser extent everyday, the challenge for our schools is to determine a means . . . to rise above that which is occurring in the greater society and to create, if necessary, an island of excellence where all individuals can feel comfortable, respected, and flourish personally and intellectually. That is the challenge for our schools, for the Proviso Township high schools, and it is certainly one we are serious about.

That is not to say that denial should occur. That is not to say that our students or any affiliated with us should be insulated from the reality of racism or racial bias. . . . Students of color—and we can also say women—need to understand that racism exists. They will continue to confront it and they need to be equipped to handle it. . . . We should not put blinders on and present everything as okay. All students and adults, regardless of race need to understand that denial of opportunity to any diminishes us all. . . .

A second point here is that we have worked very hard to diversify our faculty and staff. This past year, one-third of the certified staff hired for our district are people of color. . . . It is important for us to continue ongoing efforts in terms of textbooks and materials. All of our students need to see themselves effectively and properly depicted. . . .

In summary we are not at all in a position where we can dismiss the information in the *New York Times Magazine* article. At the same time I think it is important for us through this kind of a forum . . . to enhance the picture [of us] so people can understand more fully what we are about in the Proviso West Township High School.[2]

Leo Banks, chair of the board of education:

We have over 10 towns feeding into the two high schools and 6 or 7 feeder districts. We have a diverse [population] within Proviso Township high schools and to that end I do not think that we are any less or any

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2 Transcript of testimony before the Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 1994, Hillside, IL, pp. 274–85 (hereafter referred to as Transcript).

more subject to any race views or tensions than any other community in the country.

I think we have a unique position being west of Chicago and we have inherited migration from the city. And to that end we are doing our best to work with the diverse communities, communities that feed into our high schools. . . .

Our highest priority is the students, to make sure the students feel comfortable, are supported, and get the best possible education that we can deliver. Second to that is making sure that our staff is supported. . . .

Right now about 35 percent of our students . . . go on to college and they are doing well. I am a personal example of that. I have two daughters who have graduated from this high school and they are doing well. They have had no problems at the larger or smaller universities or colleges.

Our high schools traditionally have been rated very high within the country and within Illinois. . . . In recent years we seemed to have tapered off and to have not pushed forward as we would have hoped, but we know that and we think we are right at the measure. . . . We recognize that improvements are always needed and we are always looking for ways to get and define those improvements.[3]

C. Rebecca Montoya, principal:

Proviso West is a suburban high school with a student enrollment of 2,398 as of October 1, 1994. The demographic breakdown is 56.71 percent African American, or 1,360 students; 23.64 percent Hispanic, or 567 students; 16.35 percent white, or 392 students; 3.29 percent Asians, or 79 students. . . . As our demographics indicate, we are a culturally rich high school. Our diversity is not only in our heritage and background, but includes economic status and academic skills.

A few years ago . . . the school could not be described as culturally rich. However, it could be described as uniformly white. . . . Margaret Meade once wrote, "The pattern of the future is change." All we have to do is look around us to see the truth in that statement. . . .

TABLE 15
Faculty and Staff Participants

| | |
|---|---|
| Patrick Ambrose | Social Studies |
| Daniel Batka | Physical Education |
| Patricia Berent | English |
| Dale Crawford | Asst Superintendent |
| Douglas Deuchler | Library |
| Rose Hampton | Guidance |
| Darrell Howard | English |
| Connie Jensen | Guidance |
| Mona Johnson | School Social Worker |
| Beverly Malone | Guidance |
| Carol Radkiewicz | English |
| Robert Rosignolo | Business Education |
| Kathy Schlatter | Guidance |
| Gail Suffredin | Special Education |
| Debra Thomas | Special Education |
| Linda Thompson | Paraprofessional |
| Alexis Palm-Wallace | English |

The schools cannot exist without the support of the public, and they are not going to support something which they perceive as unproductive. . . . I am proud of our students and of our staff and we will continue to make every attempt to live up to our motto at Proviso West High School, "Nothing But the Best."[4]

## Faculty and Staff

Patrick Ambrose, 2 years at Proviso West:

I have not seen any obvious, blatant prejudice [or] discrimination based upon any ethnic, religious background by faculty and, really, by the students either.

I read the *Times* article and I thought that [the author] took the racial part of Proviso, meaning the diversity, and he smeared that. We were under the impression in the assembly he was supposed to write a piece about Proviso West as a typical high school. I wondered if he [Bissinger] was even here. . . . He focused in on one small piece and stretched the truth, it seems to me, to sell papers. He didn't say anything about any other things; he just concentrated on that issue. And he

3 Ibid., pp. 450–53.

4 Ibid., pp. 6–8.

might think this is a big issue, but I have never seen it as a big issue around here.[5]

Daniel Batka, 6 years at Proviso West:

As far as my reaction to the [*Times*] article, I wondered if the person that was researching and writing the article actually was at our high school truthfully and honestly because I don't believe those things have occurred here. I was very upset to read what he had written. It was our impression that he was doing another piece besides what he actually came up with. . . .

I am also the multicultural club sponsor here in which we try to get all races together, not only to celebrate our individual racial background, but also to come together and celebrate our oneness. . . . I think one of the things that a lot of the students have brought up is they do not quite understand the different cultures. They don't quite understand where the African American population comes from, and [where] the European American population comes from, and why some of the Hispanic population are a little bit more quiet and have a tendency to blend in . . . whereas some of the African American [and] European American population will take a stand.[6]

Patricia Berent, 25 years at Proviso West:

I am one of the people who was discussed in the article and I would like to verify that there were misquotations in the article. There were misperceptions in the article, and the article—as some of the students said—was very disappointing in that it only looked for something media worthy.

I am one of the people on whom there is a section on writing. My students were in the computer room and Mr. Bissinger would come around and take things directly off the screen of the computer. They were freshmen, basic students, and some of my very best students in the sense that they try the hardest.

I was quoted in the [*Times*] article as saying these students will never get to college or some such thing. Well I know that is not true. I know some of my students who start out in freshman basic—the lowest academic class that we have—have moved on to college. They moved up through the different classes, got the help that they needed, and improved. That is how this school is run.[7]

Dale Crawford, 28 years at Proviso West:

The reader of the May *New York Times* piece and this morning's *Chicago Tribune* piece, unfamiliar with the day to day activity at Proviso West, may draw conclusions about Proviso West which I think are very inaccurate.[8] Conclusions drawn from very broad generalizations, from quotations for which a specific context is not established, and from clear factual inaccuracies.

If racism is defined as a belief that race is a primary determinant of human traits and capabilities, then I am here to tell you that that belief is not rampant at Proviso West High School. . . . Proviso's faculty and staff are committed to the belief that all students, regardless of their race, their ethnicity, or their economic condition, can learn all that we or any other educational organization can teach. . . .

If, however, people who use the term racism . . . mean in their use of the term that problems between and among individuals and/or groups occur occasionally or frequently as a result of not understanding the values that motivate individuals or groups from different backgrounds, and not knowing the appropriate strategies to employ when confronted with that lack of understanding, then I am here to tell you that at Proviso Township High School such misunderstandings have occurred. . . . I do not offer that statement as an excuse or as a rationalization, but as an unfortunate human reality; a reality that this school district has been attempting to address for 28 years at least to which I can speak.

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5 Ibid., pp. 136–37.

6 Ibid., pp. 136–37 and 140–41.

7 Ibid., pp. 108–09. "Basic" refers to Chapter 1 educational programs for the educationally disadvantaged. Students in a basic program read 2 or more years below grade level.

8 Crawford is referring to an article in the *Chicago Tribune*, "Proviso West Focus of U.S. Racism Probe," Nov. 30, 1994, regarding the Advisory Committee's meeting.

If my memory is accurate, it was in the fall of 1970, that I sat in this same little theater at a general faculty meeting of the Proviso West staff and listened to a social studies teacher present a new curriculum for a course that had been written the previous summer entitled, "Afro American History." At that time there were no African American students at Proviso West High School. There were few African American teachers.[9]

Douglas Deuchler, 10 years at Proviso West:

I have seen an incredible number of people who have valiantly and very positively worked for positive—dealing with a lot of the issues that we have been discussing. There has always been a minority of people who just do not feel ownership of our students.

We have talked about cultural diversity. Some people do not see it that way. They see it as a sinking ship as each year we have got an increasing number of African American students. They perceived that as the end of Proviso, and I actually stopped going to one of the lounges because the gentleman in there kept referring to the urban barbarians and some of the animal behavior they would discuss was very offensive to me.

Initially, 10 years ago when our black enrollment was small . . . there were people who would admit to being totally color blind and the old thing about "I don't see [color]". . . . Rather than admitting that there might be problems here, they would say there is no diversity. . . .

The [African American] boys are often perceived as a problem to be dealt with. Nobody cherishes them, nobody. A minority of people deal with them in a positive way at times.[10]

Rose Hampton, 12 years at Proviso West:

When [Bissinger] was here he asked me a question about racism and it was off the record and this is what I told him. I said, to be honest, I don't feel racism, but I feel people ignorant to the fact of multiculturalism. When we were going through the inservice [on multiculturalism] and the school tried to get teachers to go, people stonewalled. They did not want to hear it. . . . When we hold ourselves off we do these kids an injustice. . . . We do need somebody to help us get this stuff together here.

The teachers here are good teachers. I have seen kids come here and do not know anything and leave here with a 25 on the ACT. So there are good teachers here, but they do not and they will not learn unless they ask somebody for help and I am here to say we need help and I am going to be honest about it.

I was raised in an all-black neighborhood, all-black schools. I never lived around white or Caucasian people or Asian people. I don't know anything about them. But when I came here, I had an open mind. I used to walk through these halls and speak to people and I still do today. And they come to the mailboxes and they won't even open their mouths. And you're telling me there's not a problem. I want to know why.[11]

Darrell Howard, 1 year at Proviso West:

I was a student here from 1985 to 1989. . . . From what I have seen in my time here as both a student and a staff member, the staff here is not quite representative of the student population. There are a handful of black teachers here. I attribute that in large part to the lack of black education majors at colleges and universities.

I know Proviso is active in trying to recruit minority teachers. I'm a product of their recruitment. . . . There are other things that Proviso could do as well, things such as education for the teachers. They are doing a lot of that [but it is] more on the teacher whether they elect to take courses. With the staff being as young as it is right now, I believe that it will change.[12]

Connie Jensen, 9 years at Proviso West:

When I applied here I was fully aware that this was a culturally diverse school. I don't think I would want to work in a district high school that was not diverse. It is

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9 Transcript, pp. 147–49.

10 Ibid., pp. 365–66.

11 Ibid., pp. 125–26.

12 Ibid., pp. 106–07.

exciting to work with all kinds of different people and I think, in general, the kids and the staff get along quite well.[13]

Mona Johnson, 16 years at Proviso West:

I have been here 16 years, so I have seen no diversity, as well as diversity.... When I first arrived here, as a minority or African American, it was very difficult to be in a setting where it was predominantly white.... I guess what really disturbed me was that if you would go to the mailbox and would speak to someone, they would not part their lips....

I have had an experience where one white student came to me very upset because whites were becoming the minority. It was very difficult for him to be in an environment where [he] was walking through the halls and [felt like he] had no ownership. And I had an opportunity to speak to an African American who expressed the concern [of] being ignored in the classroom. What he said in the classroom was not considered as assertiveness or debatable, but militant.... And I have had Hispanics saying that the [school] really didn't even acknowledge their culture....

I have seen situations where our African American [students] have had to be arrested here in our building with handcuffs and taken out. Now, maybe that was procedure, but for an African American that was a form of slavery, which they in turn felt that was a bias.... So many times, we, as staff members, enforce policy and discipline [and] do not see what it is doing to the culture.... We lose that. That is why a lot of minorities feel they have been wronged in some ways.[14]

Beverly Malone, 8 years at Proviso West:

Proviso is a very supportive setting to me. I've been very happy here.... People are helpful to me here and as a black female I don't feel that anyone has ever been unfair to me. If I have had problems, I feel that there has always been someone here that I can go to to get support and to get my needs met....

What I see here is basically what I see in society. There are people that do not get along here. But that is based on the fact that maybe that is a personality type situation and not necessarily just because it is a racial situation.... But I think everybody feels as though they can express their opinion here and when they do, I think that that information that they give is taken and is done constructively.....

Sometimes I feel that maybe if we had more money that would help us to be able to do other things if we had more time. It is not so much the racial component; sometimes we just don't have enough time to do a lot of things we would like to do....

I think we spend more time [here] trying to ameliorate all of the negative publicity that we get, which we got a lot of. People want to hear more of the bad things than they want to hear the good things.[15]

Carol Radkiewicz, 30 years at Proviso West:

The school has changed drastically in the [last] 30 years, but as far as I am concerned, the school has changed only for the better.... I was absolutely appalled, humiliated, hurt, and very angered when I read the [*New York Times Magazine*] article. I think it is slanted, what we call yellow journalism, very sensationalized and very untrue. It not only hurt me, it hurt my other teachers. It has hurt my community and it hurt my students. The article is all slanted.

I spoke with [Mr. Bissinger] for about 8 hours of time. What I said the gentleman did not agree with, so it does not appear anywhere in the article. He was very clever. He looked at me and said, "Well, what do you think about the blacks, you know, do you really think that they are less academic than the whites?" I said, "They are not any less in anything." He said, "Well don't you think they really are not as able?" [I replied that] often they are more capable. A person's viewpoint that did not agree with what he was looking for at our school never appeared in the article.

I relooked at my school. Is my school dirty? Are there dirty handkerchiefs hanging out there? Are there steel

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13 Ibid., p. 338.

14 Ibid., pp. 359–60, 362–64.

15 Ibid., pp. 338–39, 340, and 345.

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doors, etc.? [The article] is totally incorrect. Our school has adjusted well to the change that has occurred. In my English classes I expect three times as much from the students now, as from 30 years ago. I am very pleased to say that there is nothing but positive changes, and this article has been absolutely untrue.[16]

Robert Rosignolo, 23 years at Proviso West:

I started at Proviso West in 1972. The school was all white [then]. I enjoyed my experience then and I am still here and I still enjoy my experience. I deal with people as individuals and I try to do the best I can and that is the way I approach life in dealing with anyone. . . .

The problem is the perception in the community, and what the perception is that is the reality. And we have tried to convince people if you feel that there are certain things wrong with Proviso West, come and see for yourself and see what it is like at Proviso West and make your own judgments. But don't listen to what other people say. That has hurt us because the reality is we are a functioning school which is trying to do the best job we can, and there are a lot of good things going on here. But there is a lot of reaction in the community that those things are not happening and that has hurt us.[17]

Kathy Schlatter, 22 years at Proviso West:

I was not quoted in the [*Times*] article because I avoided Mr. Bissinger totally. I must say once I read the article, I was not sorry.

I truly enjoy [Proviso]. I enjoy all of my students, the English department I was a part of [and] now the counseling department. I feel that there are so many people here working very, very hard for all of our students and there are some [students] who are taking tremendous advantage of that and there are those who are not. . . .

Those people who choose to send their children elsewhere, if they think that they are getting a better education in the district, are absolutely incorrect, in my opinion. There is no question in my mind that a student here can get the best education possible, certainly districtwide. Why would they go somewhere else? Is there better discipline there? I am sorry, I do not really think that we have let go of discipline here.[18]

Gail Suffredin, 9 years at Proviso West:

I can honestly say that I feel that the students are being served well. There are always going to be, in any given group of people, people who are tolerant, people who are accepting, people who are understanding. And there are always going to be a few people that are not as tolerant, accepting, and understanding. . . . The programs here are excellent. . . . Unfortunately there are [some] students in our school that are not as motivated [but] I think the teachers as a whole do their best to motivate the students.[19]

Debra Thomas, 4 years at Proviso West:

Not only do I teach here, but I live in the district also. As a taxpayer and a teacher I have some real concerns that many of our teachers have lost sight of the reason of going to school to become a teacher. I feel many of them fail to motivate many of our kids and then they get labeled special ed or I end up having them in my classroom, because I am in the special education department. . . .

I agree . . . that we need to try and recruit more minority teachers, as African Americans and Hispanics being the makeup of our population. However, I don't feel that only African American teachers can teach African American children.[20]

Linda Thompson, 4 years at Proviso West:

When I began working [in this district] I was a white female in a predominantly African American school

16 Ibid., pp. 97–98.

17 Ibid., pp. 380, 382–83.

18 Ibid., pp. 109–11, 122–23.

19 Ibid., pp. 348 and 353.

20 Ibid., pp. 370–72.

and it was a new experience for me. It turned out to be probably one of the best experiences of my life. . . . I was able to get rid of a lot of perceptions that I thought I did not have. I did not think I had these ideas and then I found out that, really, I did, and as I got to know the students and I got to know the parents, it was a good experience. . . . What I have seen here is that racism is a perception. We often think that we are not prejudiced, but all of us are to some degree. . . .

The majority of our paraprofessional staff is African American at this time. We do have white paraprofessionals. Our secretarial staff is predominantly white female. That is changing somewhat, we do have Hispanic and African American secretaries now.[21]

Alexis Palm-Wallace, 15 years at Proviso West:

I would honestly say that 95 percent of the young people [at Proviso] have learned to peacefully coexist, either by tolerating, accepting, or even assimilating each other interculturally and intraculturally.

I respect a great majority of the individual [teachers at Proviso West] because I feel that they truly and sincerely serve the student population in earnest. [But] I cannot blind myself to the certain individuals who are biased, self-serving, self-righteous, and ignorant. As the ethnicity of the school has changed, I have seen the proliferation of rules, rules not to evoke change in behavior or to teach appropriate behavior, but to serve the lack of desire of these certain individuals . . . to deal with students from differing backgrounds. . . . We have an excellent school with superior academics, but we are not in a perfect world. And like people are flawed, so too does this school have flaws.[22]

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21 Ibid., pp. 378 and 388.

22 Ibid., pp. 349–51.

Part 5

# Parent and Community Comments

Opinions regarding the *New York Times Magazine* article and the educational opportunities at Proviso West were obtained from parents and individuals in the community. Fourteen parents spoke at the meeting; eight were invited by the Advisory Committee; their participation was solicited because of their active role in the school.[1] One parent followed her testimony with a written comment, and one parent had been quoted in the *Times* article.

Eight individuals from the community provided comments to the Advisory Committee. Four had been invited to testify, the invitations made through the local chapter of the NAACP and another local group lobbying the school administration for more minority teachers. Two spoke at the public session; two other individuals submitted written comments, one being a letter sent to the editor of the *New York Times Magazine* rebutting the Proviso article.

The parents generally rebutted the factual content and the tone of the *New York Times Magazine* article, and extolled the diversity of Proviso West and the excellent educational opportunities available for their children. Community opinion was mixed, and included other concerns such as allegations of unfair school discipline and discriminatory employment practices. Comments from every parent and individual in the community who spoke or wrote to the Advisory Committee are included.

TABLE 16
Parent and Community Participants

| Parents | Community |
|---|---|
| Joseph D. Beilner | Susan Gill |
| Gene Belmonte | Lester Grant |
| Janice Bennett[1] | Latressa Hodges-Lumpkin |
| Terry Blaine | Garland Robeson |
| Cynthia Breunlin[2] | Linda Barney-St. Martin[2] |
| J.B. Carr | Walter Sally, III[2] |
| Michael Lusk | John Thompson |
| Mary Murphy | Valerie Voss |
| McArthur Robinson | |
| Andrea Routen | |
| Richard Ryan | |
| Renate Schulz | |
| James E. Smith, Jr. | |
| Lucy Smith | |

[1] Quoted in the *New York Times Magazine* article.
[2] Submitted written comments.

## Parents

Joseph D. Beilner*:

I am a parent and I am also a vice president of the Proviso West booster club. I have a daughter that graduated from [this] school 2 years ago and is a sophomore at the University of Illinois in Champaign. I have also two daughters here, a senior and a sophomore.

The gentleman that wrote the article spent roughly 2½ hours at my home and spoke to all three of my daughters . . . my wife and myself. [We] talked 15 percent of the time about concerns [at Proviso West] that are concerns in every major high school in the United States, [and we] talked 85 percent of the time about good programs that happen at [Proviso West]. . . .

. . . I talked to this gentleman, and I am almost like Bobby Knight, the basketball coach at the University of

1 Parents invited to testify are denoted by an asterisk "*."

Indiana, [in that] I hate newspapers, I hate the media. Looking at the [*Times*] article [angered] me. . . . I don't understand where he came from.

The newspapers, the journalists, and the media just take things out of context. [This guy] set some of the kids up in this school. "May I quote you on that?" [he asked], and the second part of the sentence, that's what he doted on. The kids learned from that last year. It is unfortunate that some people around our town do not wake up to the value of education that they can receive here at this school.[2]

Gene Belmonte:

My oldest son was a student from 1984 to 1989 at Proviso West. My younger son is currently a student now. I am a former school board member of school district 92½ in Westchester, a feeder district to this school district. I am a PTO member there. Uniquely enough I am also a former newspaper owner and newspaper editor of the *Westchester News*. . . .

. . . I think your reaction to the *New York Times Magazine* article—as many other people's reactions to it—is almost humorous, but it is actually more tragic than it is humorous. . . . It is very difficult to fight a national powerhouse and a member of the media, a super media as the *New York Times*, especially when there [are] sensational aspects. . . .

. . . The article was inflammatory, and the reactions to it unfortunately fan the flames on both ends of the spectrum, the racism as it is. And that racism does exist, both in the black and white community.

The fact that you are investigating racism at Proviso West is incredibly ironic. The reason that my sons go to school here is because it is a multicultural institution. This is one of the few places in the western suburbs and in the Chicago suburban area in which you can experience a multicultural experience while going to high school. The majority of schools are tremendously black or tremendously white. . . .

. . . The fact that [Proviso West] has to defend itself and go through this is ironic. It is not void of the problems that exist in all facets of American education, but it is a place that works very hard at being good and fair to students and educating them. . . . Problems do exist [but] I don't think it exists here to any degree that merits this kind of treatment for them. . . .[3]

Janice Bennett*:

I have not experienced any problems at this school. My daughter did not attend this school the first year; she went to a Lutheran high school because I listened to what other people had to say instead of coming up here myself to see what the school was like. My daughter has been here since she was a sophomore and she has grown tremendously at this school. . . .

. . . [*The New York Times Magazine* article] was not an accurate reflection of what happens [here]. In fact I called [Bissinger] after the fact because I was very upset. We were so excited. We thought this is going to be great for the school. When I picked up the newspaper and I started reading it, I was hurt. And I was very angry . . . at [Bissinger].

He came into my home and misrepresented himself. He sat at my dining room table, ate my cake, drank my coffee, and he put a bunch of lies in the newspaper. . . . He takes one thing and puts it in the paper to make it misconstrue everything you say. So as far as what he said, his credibility was lost and the paper was not accurate.[4]

Terry Blaine*:

I am a resident of Westchester. I currently have a senior daughter here. My oldest daughter graduated in 1990 from here. I graduated in 1961 from here. So I have been in Westchester for a while. I have been an officer in the PTO for several years. I was in the original group that formed the PTO. I was their first president. . . .

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2 Transcript of the Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, community forum, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 1994, Hillside, IL, pp. 160–61 (hereafter referred to as Transcript).

3 Ibid., pp. 218–21.

4 Ibid., pp. 174 and 176.

. . . [My daughters] have never come home and complained of any racial problems. So I won't go so far as to say that are none here because I am sure there are. There's some where I work. It's everywhere, but it does not seem to affect students and the education that they are getting [at Proviso West]. . . .

. . . [An] example [of media misreporting] would be the news last night when they covered this Committee being here. The closing remarks of the reporter was that there was, I believe, 5 students from Proviso West and 16 from Proviso East that were expelled because they were found with guns and harassing teachers, physically abusing teachers. What [the reporter] did not tell the people and the general public was that the student did not get in the school with guns. But now the perception is everybody in this school is carrying a gun. That is the type of press that really hurts. They don't tell quite the whole story. And I think those are the things that really get us in a bind.[5]

Cynthia Breunlin:

We too have been disturbed by the powerful effects of the *New York Times* article. The glare and the spotlight on one suburban school made it impossible to pass the referendum, difficult for teachers to hold on to their enthusiasm, and confusing for young people.

Racism is prejudice with power to harm. It means to me that only those with power should be held accountable. Random slights and insults by those with prejudice can be corrected if racism is addressed. Unfortunately, the wider community also bears responsibility for the racism directed towards Proviso West. The myths and misperceptions swirl around the young people.

West Cook leaders visited Proviso West Oct. 18, 1994. We were pleased to tour the building and visit classrooms. I wrote a great essay to the local paper to encourage support for the district. . . . We offer encouragement and support for district 209. We appreciate the efforts of the board and Dr. Eversley. Diversity is our future and we need to address the challenge of diversity, including negative attitudes and institutional practices. Only by working together can we provide models for young people in education.[6]

J.B. Carr*:

I personally have not had any bad experiences [at Proviso West] and my child has not related any [bad] experience that she has had as far as race is concerned. I am active here at the school . . . so I am around the kids a lot. I work with the concession stands when the kids are loose and out in the open and [away] from parent [control]. I have not seen any racial confrontations at all. I have heard that there are gangs . . . in the school, but my child has not expressed any situations with them. So as far as I am concerned on a personal basis, most races . . . get along well in and out of the classroom. . . .

. . . When I heard about the [*New York Times Magazine* article], I asked my daughter her opinion since she is up here and she has contact with most of the teachers. She did not agree with how the article came out. So based on that . . . it was another media newsletter, and I teach my daughter to only believe half of what she reads if she is not there and cannot verify it. . . .

. . . Most of the parents that I deal with have not expressed a concern of a racial nature. . . . You do have parents come and express that they feel that a decision was made or based on the race . . . I feel from a personal experience that they are dealt with fairly, because if they have any question, the assistant principal who is normally in charge of [discipline] situations, . . . gives an answer, some type of response. Now whether they are happy with that response [is another matter], because I have a child here who has been expelled for a situation. And I did not feel that it was handled properly, not because of race, but just because of the rules in general.[7]

Michael Lusk*:

I am from the community of Westchester. I have been in the community for 15 years. I am currently a school board member for Westchester district 92½. I have one

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5 Ibid., pp. 409, 410, and 416–17.

6 Letter to the Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Dec. 20, 1994, Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR, files.

7 Transcript, pp. 173–74, 175, 179, and 181–82.

child in school [here] as a freshman, and I had one child graduate last year, who is now attending the University of Iowa. . . .

. . . I spent an hour and a half with [Bissinger] on the phone on a Sunday night and he did not mention my name at all [in the article]. Every time I talked to him and answered questions for him I was very positive about Proviso West. But in looking back at the article and having heard comments from other people, I could definitely see some type of a pattern. Every time I said something positive, he would bring up a negative and he would pounce on that. When I would move on, he would go back to that and say. "But isn't there something else you know?" " Why are they doing this?" In reviewing, I can definitely see he was not looking for the positives, he was looking for sensationalism. And that is what he got. . . .

. . . I am very pro Proviso West. [But] I would love to see some different faces at some of the PTO functions instead of seeing the same faces for the last 5 years. Parental involvement at this school is very lacking. We keep pounding on people to participate. We have a PTO meeting four times a year and we only get 40 or 50 people. Sometimes we get 70 [and] I almost have a heart failure. But that is the type of attitude that comes from this type of socioeconomic reality in this school [and] sometimes it is hard. . . .

. . . We can't [even] get all the teachers to come participate in the PTO. I have been here 5 years. And I walk through the halls, and it amazes me the teachers that I haven't seen, and they have been teachers here for 20 years. Which goes to show that the teachers here need a kick too.[8]

Mary Murphy:

I have six children; three have graduated from Proviso [West], two are now attending, and I have one in grade school. . . . I asked each of my children before I came here today, "Did you ever have racial problems? Are you having any now?" They have not.

My son was in Mr. Patterson's class last year. He said what was in the newspapers [*New York Times Magazine* article] was not what he saw in that classroom. They love Mr. Patterson; he treated them well. They got along with the black students. He said there were times when they kind of paired off because they had more in common with each other, just didn't know each other that well. But we have not had a problem, and they all felt very badly about the article when it came out. . . .

. . . None of us are perfect, but I believe that here at Proviso we are trying. We need more parents involved in cooperation. . . . Students come in this door and teachers are expected to work miracles. It is a cooperative effort between parents, teachers, students, and the community.

I love Proviso West. My daughter turned down a scholarship to go to IHM [Immaculate Heart of Mary] to come to Proviso. I have a son who is a National Merit and Presidential Scholar winner. He is graduating from Illinois State University this year with a degree in chemistry. All of my children have gotten a wonderful education here. I don't have complaints about the school. Yes, I believe it can be better, and I want to roll up my sleeves and help.[9]

McArthur Robinson*:

I have two children here, one that graduated from here, and I am involved with a couple of activities here. . . . We have gotten a lot of negative publicity from the things that were stated in the [*New York Times Magazine*] newspaper article and on the whole I think this is a good school. I think kids get a good education over here and the ones that really want it, they get it because it is here. . . .

. . . I can't say there is no racial problem here. Anywhere you go there can be a racial problem, but I don't think it is what it is made out to be here. I've made a good rapport here. I've come to parent-teacher meetings with my kids to get their grades and everybody that I have met so far I have had good rapport with. . . .

. . . I've [heard people] speaking about the noise level here at this school. And I've been here during when kids are moving from class to class and the noise level is above normal. But the kids we're raising today are much different than 20 or 30 years ago, for whatever

8 Ibid., 432–33, 437, and 438.

9 Ibid., pp. 128–29.

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reason. We can cite a lot of reasons. It's kind of hard to discipline kids at home now. . . . You can't even, if you see a kid that's doing something wrong now, you can't even say, "Son, I don't think you should do that." I've said that to a couple of children that I've seen doing some wrong things and I wouldn't care to say the language what they told me. This is the way it is now. . . .[10]

Andrea Routen*:

Proviso [West] has gotten a bad rap with a lot of negative publicity and it is hurting the community. It is hurting the quality of teachers we have. And it is definitely hurting the students. There may be a lot of students that could or could not decide to come to Proviso West in the future. . . .

. . . We have a lot of quality students currently living in the area and if those students and their parents decide to uproot and move in different areas, the reflection of some of the incoming students may or may not have the same potential as those that are currently leaving. . . . So what we have is an unequal balance in the educational system; it is a little lopsided. The quality of the education in some areas surely differs from other areas. There is no doubt . . . what is coming [into this district] sometimes creates a negative for the people that are deciding to stay. . . .

. . . The students that we have in our school right now, if they see that this is the primary issue, then what do they have to look forward to. We have the opinion of one person creating total uproar in our community and it hurts, it really does. I have not seen any direct racial problems. I am not saying that they don't exist, because they probably do, but I have not been directly involved in any racial situations.[11]

Richard Ryan*:

I think if you start with the premise that racism, however you may want to define it . . . , exists generally in society, then it would be naive of us to assume in a multicultural school such as Proviso West that it does not also exist. We have to accept that fact.

Do I personally think it is a dominant theme around here? No, I do not. Certainly there is going to be incidents among the students, between the faculty, and between the faculty and the students to one degree or another. . . . Anytime you get elements between people who do not know each other, there is going to be misunderstanding. . . . That is typical of what may happen around here.

I have a daughter here who is a senior. I have a daughter who graduated from this school, both of whom are very favorable about their education here. Have there been incidents that they have reported to me? Certainly there have been, but no different than what you would find at any other school, no matter what their racial makeup. . . .

. . . I think the school gets a bad rap from the media, both locally and nationally, because of the ignorance of the facts. They never have checked us out around here. We talk among ourselves . . . that most of the people in the area that rap Proviso West have never set foot in the school. They don't know what this school is like. They have no basis to make a criticism when they have no idea what happens.

I think the media in this area is extremely biased against Proviso West, not withstanding any racial issues or prejudicial issues. If you look at the local newspapers, whether they be the *Suburban Life*, the *Westchester News*, or whatever it happens to be, all the articles you see in there are about other areas, other schools. And particularly the *Suburban Life* is extremely prejudiced in favor of Lyons Township. That is all they write about. . . . You never see anything about Proviso West.[12]

Renate Schulz:

My daughter was grabbed by a boy. He happened to be a black boy. But she is muscular and she pushed him against the wall. And he said, "Oh, I didn't know she was that strong." So nothing bad came out of it; my daughter wasn't expelled and he wasn't expelled.

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10 Ibid., pp. 419–20 and 421–22.

11 Ibid., pp. 410–11 and 412–13.

12 Ibid., pp. 160–61 and 167–68.

Maybe students don't know they are not supposed to touch each other. They are not supposed to. My other daughter, she is out of school now, at that time her hair was still quite blond and long. And some students, black students, tried to touch it. Now I don't know what is so special about it, but white students never touched her, or kidded her, or anything. Maybe the kids just should be told not to touch somebody because that is not proper.[13]

James E. Smith, Jr.*:

I am a parent of a senior here. I am president of the PTO. I am involved with the booster club, and I am a graduate of Proviso West. . . . Regarding the [*New York Times Magazine*] article, I was not happy with it. I didn't think it portrayed Proviso as it is. It focused only on black and white, which I think ignores the diversity that is here at the school.

I think you have seen statistics on our student population which is probably 57 percent African American, [around] 25 percent Hispanic, 18 percent white, and 3 percent other. So "other" is a mixture of Asian, Indian, Filipino, and many others. There is a program for students who have a first language other than English. At last report, they had—I think—16 languages being spoken at the Proviso Township district other than English as a first language. Those students come here to Proviso West. . . . The article did not address any of that. . . . I don't know a school that has this kind of diversity that is not a unit school district. Proviso West has, minimally, six feeder districts. And to assimilate these people and to provide them with the education they do, I think is quite excellent. . . .

. . . The irritation that we have within the parent-teacher's organization is that we seem to always be defending the school from things that are inaccurate. . . . As parents we are more concerned than the general population as to the safety of the students; whether there's gangs, whether there's drugs. . . . My wife and I have been here during the school day. It is a safe place, it is a good place. . . .

. . . We were happy when my son chose to come here. He chose to come here. We gave him the opportunity to look at the schools in the area and he chose to come here and that is one of the reasons we got involved. We heard the negative stories, [but] we're here.[14]

Lucy Smith:

I have a son who is a senior here. I've been very involved in the PTO organization and I've been very happy with the education my son has received. He particularly chose to come to this school. We gave him an opportunity to go wherever he wanted, and he chose to come here. We looked at private schools and other public schools, but he wanted to come to Proviso and he wanted to be in a community that was multicultural and learn about different kinds of people. . . .

. . . The PTO organization is a black and white group. We get along very well and we are looking to improve the school as best we can. It seems like the past years I have been involved, half the time we spend trying to figure out how we can convince people that all the things that they say in the paper are not true[it is not] happening here.

. . . The basic attitude of the PTO about all the bad publicity is to say that we don't feel a lot of it deserves to be. You give credence to something if you have to go and defend it and say that it is not the truth. So a lot of times we don't want to say things and defend every time somebody says something outrageous.[15]

## Community

Susan Gill[16]:

My children are mixed. My husband is black and I am white. . . . My children, in their unique type of situation, would experience negative things and positive things from both black people and white people. . . . I never felt that the way a teacher would react to my children had to determine how they did in that class. They had to determine how they did in that class. . . .

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13 Ibid., p. 236.

14 Ibid., pp. 419, 422, 424, and 426–27.

15 Ibid., pp. 212–13 and 217.

16 Susan Gill is the mother of biracial children who graduated from Proviso West in 1992.

. . . My biggest problem at Proviso West during the time my children were here—and you have to understand that it was a different school board and a different administration and even different guidance counselors—was with the guidance department. Black children were basically being told—not now—at that time, not to pursue higher education. Even my own children who happen to be straight A students were told not to bother going any further than Triton College. . . . What I did about that was I went to . . . the head of the guidance department . . . and I told them that the guidance counselors would not counsel my children, do not allow them to do that, . . . and that was taken care of. . . .

. . . During the time I was a parent here there was a big transition going on with the board of education. The old guard who had been in power for 30 years and were still living in the fifties basically were retiring and they were leaving and we had new people. . . . So I think there is a lot of potential in Proviso West, the Proviso West High School District, tremendous potential.[17]

Lester Grant:

I contend that [Proviso West] is not that bad as it stands today. I happen to serve on one of the boards of education that send children over to West and I was highly insulted when I read and heard some of the comments that were made in the news media coming from even teachers here at West. I hope the individuals at West that made those statements have found themselves another place to teach where they feel comfortable and not interrupt and hinder African American and other students. The whole school will suffer if we have cancers like that in the school that prevent young people from getting an education.

As far as dealing with one of the communities that wants to go off on their own, I hope the citizens will consider what they are doing before they follow those guidelines in those footsteps in people that have taken them down the wrong path.[18] I contend that we all as citizens owe it to all of our children to see that they all get an education. If you are going to live in this world today, you are going to have to deal with diversity or you will not be able to survive and prosper. . . .

. . . I did have children that went to school at West. . . . As far as knowing of any particular incident as far as discrimination, I am not aware of any. But looking at things realistically, you know that it is there. It is just observation. I guess my experience as a black person has [made] me pretty much of an expert in institutions like that. . . . What I have been hearing is that people say in the past they were able to teach because they were teaching white children and white children are being taught by a white teacher. If they could do it then, what is the problem now?[19]

Latressa Hodges-Lumpkin:

I am vice president of the West Suburban Proviso Chapter of the NAACP. . . . Our position has been that discipline is not meted out fairly. In expulsions, there were 21 this week; 5 here at West, 16 over at East. Suspensions, be they at home or in school, are not meted out fairly. We found that black and Latino students were disciplined more harshly for similar infractions than their white counterparts. . . .[20]

. . . We have advocated . . . for hiring and retaining Latino, black, Asian, and Native American teachers. . . . What we find time and time again is that the minorities are hired either to teach P.E. or relegated to paraprofessionals or to janitors or custodial workers and they are not in the classrooms.[21] We have not looked to inflame any of the situations, but to address situations and correct them because if they are

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17 Transcript, pp. 394, 395–97.

18 The *New York Times Magazine* article identified "Citizens United for Better Education, a movement founded by several Westchester residents in 1992 to explore the possibility of 'de-annexing' their town from the Proviso high school district (*Times* article, p. 28)."

19 Transcript, pp. 193–94, 196–97.

20 Suspension data for the 1993–94 academic year by race and ethnicity is in part 2 of this report.

21 Fifty percent of faculty and administrator hires and placements at Proviso West in the last 2 academic years have been minority. In the 1993–94 academic year, 19 new faculty were hired at Proviso West: 16 white and 3 minority. In the 1994–95 academic year, 27 new faculty were hired, 23 white and 4 minority.

not addressed, if they are not put on the table, they are not going to be corrected. . . .

. . . I heard about the 2-day [in-service teacher] orientation. From what I have heard from some of the faculty members and teachers who participated in this, it was treated like a joke and it was not taught properly, that it was not implemented, and teachers did not come away with anything.[22] I keep hearing a lot of multiculturalism and those have not been the things that we are finding.[23]

The Advisory Committee asked Hodges-Lumpkin for specific information she or the NAACP had on racial discrimination in the district.

Yandle: You mentioned some of the students and some of the research that the NAACP has done. . . . Would you send us some of that information?

Hodges-Lumpkin: Ms. Constance [Davis] has it. We sent them [the Midwestern Regional Office] shipments of stuff. . . .[24]

Pugh: Can we conclude on one point? Would the information you [Hodges-Lumpkin] are talking about be made a part of the record here?

Hodges-Lumpkin: I do believe so, because we did submit it. Those things have been submitted [to the Midwestern Regional Office] prior to [the meeting].

Pugh: So it will be submitted tomorrow, [because] I have not seen it. . . .

Hodges-Lumpkin: It has already been submitted. I am sorry, do you want extra documentation? I don't know if Peter [Minarik] and Constance [Davis] are going to share those things with you.

Pugh: I don't know.

Hodges-Lumpkin: I don't know what we have to do. If I need to resubmit it, it's not a problem. I'll resubmit it.[25]

Garland Robeson:

I am here on behalf of Arnie Bryant, local NAACP president. [The NAACP] helps all students, be they black or white, with problems they might have concerning questions about their civil rights. . . . Basically it is student-teacher interactions and the negative kinds of feelings that the black students and other students get from things like discipline and attendance kinds of situations. . . .

. . . I don't think Proviso West has more problems than other schools. It is just sometimes the media, be it electronic or print, for whatever reason likes to portray West as being problematic. I think they have situations that any other high school has, just that you can get treatment that is lopsided from the media. . . .[26]

Walter Sally III*:

. . . Mr. Bissinger was not wrong in his assessment of the overall observation that racism is "alive and well" here. I heard the majority complaint by those selected to address the Commission that Proviso was getting a bad rap. I am also aware of the panel's concern for the lack of community outpouring to substantiate the allegations of racial disparity. One reason is that many

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22 On Aug. 25, 1994, the Proviso Township High School District had a faculty institute. Much of the institute was devoted to multicultural issues. Breakout sessions included: "Cultural diversity in the workplace," "A World of Difference," "Quality relationships," "Multicultural competence," "The *New York Times Magazine*: Talking out the issues." Among the presenters and moderators were the Community Relations Service, U.S. Department of Justice, and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. The agenda of the institute is in app. 4.

23 Transcript, pp. 225–26.

24 Transcript, p. 245. The Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR, received four local newspaper articles from Hodges-Lumpkin. The articles dealt with deannexation attempts by some Westchester residents.

25 Ibid., pp. 249–51. Hodges-Lumpkin did not submit to the Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR, any information other than the four newspaper articles noted in footnote 24, nor did she submit any information to the Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR, or the Committee subsequent to the meeting.

26 Ibid., pp. 402–03, 405, and 407–08.

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were not aware of the forum until that Wednesday morning's article in the paper. The local papers only advertised the vote on the tax referendum prior to that date. Many others did not want to go through what that poor unfortunate student went through for speaking up. . . . Please find also a copy of the 1992–1993 budget proposal. Note that there isn't any monies allocated for better race, residential, or student relations. Not a priority I guess![27]

Sally further asserted that the Advisory Committee is exhibiting its racism by having a meeting at Proviso West High School and about Proviso West High School.

The very fact that this [Advisory] Committee is here only when West is addressed with racism, is racism at its best. I have here a 1967 article from the *Maywood Herald* that racism has been alive in the Proviso Township some 27 years, but when it gets to [Proviso] West, then the Commission is convened and we want to talk about it. It has bled for 27 years, and now that it is ensoaked and entrenched, and now that West is getting some of it, now we want to talk about it. . . .

The main body of African Americans in the Proviso Township exist at [Proviso] East, but it is only when it starts being questioned over here [at Proviso West] is when they say, "Well let's go check it out and see if it is real."[28]

John Thompson:

I am a former employee here for almost 4 years, but recently I had to resign. . . . From my knowledge of being in the hallways I will see students running to the door and West has a policy if you are not there, we are going to shut the door. But if you shut the door when the student gets right in front of the door when the bell rings, there is no way that student can learn. . . . Sure some of the students don't want to be in the class, or they cut and they go to the cafeteria anyway, but it is a large majority of them that do want to be there, but they get turned away, and I know there are teachers who can vouch for that. . . .

. . . Approximately a year ago there was an incident that occurred in the cafeteria. Me and another paraprofessional were there. About 20 students were searched, 4 or 5 of them were young ladies. The policy is you do not search anyone until there is a dean or someone of authority on the grounds or you have permission. There was no permission given to the police counselor that we currently have on staff. He asked me to assist him in the search. I refused. He continued on with the search. When he got to the females, he searched them; he searched their purses and everything. The policy is you have a female paraprofessional when you are searching females.

There was one young man, he was an African American male. He refused to be searched and he expressed that to the police officer. He [the police officer] used profanity, just cursed at the kids. The other paraprofessional that was there heard it as well. So I went back to the staff to report this. Nobody did nothing. . . .[29]

Valerie Voss:

My daughter was a student here and I took her out of the school system last year, not because she was a troubled child, but she said she just got so tired of the challenges that she faced here at this school. One occasion she was kicked out of the classroom because she questioned the teacher. She was in an English class and the teacher told her she was using black English in writing a story. Her response was that she knows the difference between black English and standard English and this is the way the people were talking in the particular story. . . . The teacher told her that not only

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27 Walter Sally III to Peter Minarik, Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR, Dec. 21, 1994, Midwestern Regional Office files. Included with the letter to the Midwestern Regional Office was: (1) a copy of a petition with 306 signatures, initiated by Sally, "to demand better recruiting and hiring of minority educators for our children in the Proviso schools, specifically Proviso East," and (2) Notice of Substantial Evidence, from the Department of Human Rights, State of Illinois, July 26, 1991, re: Sally vs. Proviso East High School. Proviso East is the other high school in Proviso Township High School District 209.

28 Ibid., p. 209. As set out in the introduction, Proviso West High School came to the attention of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in Washington, DC, when the article about the high school appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*. The meeting is a solicitation of opinion on race relations and equal education opportunity at the high school. Neither the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights nor the Illinois Advisory Committee were aware that a Proviso East High School existed prior to this project.

29 Transcript, pp. 198, 201–03.

was she using black English, but she didn't know how to write. . . .

. . . The teacher said something about the way you make the letter M and my daughter said, "Well, I've been writing that way ever since I learned cursive." And the teacher said, "Well you don't know how to write." And so my daughter's response to her was, "[We have] something in common because sometimes when you write something on the board I don't understand either." My daughter was asked to leave the classroom, and they wanted her to do a 20-minute detention, which she refused to do.[30]

Linda Barney-St. Martin[31]:

[On] Friday, June 3, 1994, I took the opportunity to visit Proviso West. . . . The visit was revealing and stimulating, and a great deal was learned about Proviso West.

The Director of Student Affairs, Mrs. Annette Karones, gave [me] a tour and I was given the opportunity to talk to the students and the majority of the Proviso staff. I found both groups were extremely disappointed with the article.

After my tour one student asked what I thought of Proviso West now that I had a chance to see the school? My response was that I felt that the article was very inaccurate. The school was in fact a peaceful and very pleasant environment of learning.

Please note this student was not a reporter that was on the premises for 2 months, in fact she has been a student for 3 years and felt that her school was shamelessly violated by this article. Who would know better, a person who visited the school for 2 months or someone who has been attending the school for 3 years?

The picture shown of the police vehicles in the parking lot were facing Westchester, not Bellwood, as was indicated by Mr. Bissinger. I live in Voorhees, New Jersey, near Eastern High School, and police vehicles are there every day to get the traffic in and out of the school, so perhaps Mr. Bissinger was not aware of the fact that they are to control the traffic, not the students.[32]

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30 Ibid., pp. 391–92.

31 Linda Barney-St. Martin, M.D., a former Ms. Black America, visited Proviso West after reading the *Times* article. She wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in the aftermath of her visit and gave permission to the Committee to publish her letter as part of the community comment.

32 Linda Barney-St. Martin, M.D., to the editor, *New York Times Magazine*, June 10, 1994, Midwestern Regional Office, USCCR files.

Part 6

# Conclusions and Observations

The Advisory Committee conducted a community forum at Proviso West High School in response to the Commission's concern over an article about the school in the May 29, 1994, *New York Times Magazine* by H.G. Bissinger, "We're All Racist Now." A community forum is an activity of a State Advisory Committee designed to elicit opinions and perspectives about civil rights matters in a local area.[1]

It is anticipated that the value of this report will be a useful update on the attitudes and conditions at a changing high school, changes and attitudes which are far more positive than expected. To this end, the words and opinions of the students, faculty, administrators, parents, and other participants are presented without comment, and remarks from every individual who spoke or wrote to the Advisory Committee are included.

In the last 20 years Proviso West High School has undergone a transition from a virtually all-white school to a majority-black school and problems have attended the change. During its 2 days at Proviso West, the Advisory Committee found and heard about a school that is functioning in a changing environment. The operation of the building is orderly, students are generally attentive, and the faculty is by and large committed to offering a good education to a culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse student population.

The administration of the school and the high school district cooperated fully with the Advisory Committee in this endeavor. The meeting was held in the theater of Proviso West High School, and most of it was conducted during school hours. On several occasions during the 2 days, entire classes of students came with their teachers to watch the proceedings. In addition to furnishing accommodations, facilitating student and faculty participation, and providing background and demographic information, the school administration allowed its building and classes to be open and available to Advisory Committee members to tour and visit.

In examining the situation at Proviso West High School, the Advisory Committee solicited opinion on the climate of race relations and the equality of educational opportunities at Proviso West High School. To ensure that such opinion was balanced, student leaders were selected, as well as a second group of students randomly drawn from the student population. Based on what was presented, the Advisory Committee could not conclude that Proviso West is not providing equal educational opportunity to all students. On the contrary, there was no suggestion that the educational opportunity offered to whites is any better than that offered to any other racial or ethnic group. Racial tensions do exist at the school. However, to the extent that individuals stepped forward and indicated that there are some race relations problems, both between students and between teachers and students, the statements are vague and general. No specific examples and no details of racially motivated incidents, indicative of race relations problems or minority students not getting equal education opportunity, were offered to the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee understands how there are underlying tensions in this racially diverse school, but it did not hear specific cases or

1 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Administrative Manual, AI 5-7.05. A community forum differs from a factfinding, which is the gathering of data, documents, and testimony that enables a State Advisory Committee to reach a determination of facts.

examples of overt discrimination or overt racial antagonism.

The testimony critical of race relations at Proviso West High School broke down mostly into two categories: (a) general comments by students, parents, and others that racism exists at the school as it does in the society at large, and (b) more specific criticisms (all from nonstudents) regarding the recruitment, hiring, and promotion of minority employees, especially teachers.

The Advisory Committee heard of the efforts by school and district administrators, parents, students, and teachers to support multiculturalism and to discourage discrimination at Proviso West High School. However, the Advisory Committee feels more can be done to move along this difficult road. It does seem that Proviso West has made more of a commitment than most American institutions to multiculturalism and nondiscrimination, and it is therefore appropriate for it to make a superior effort to achieve the high standards it has set for itself. One particular area is increasing student and staff sensitivity to the need to work constantly at improving relations between individuals and groups of different races.

Criticisms about not hiring or promoting enough minority faculty, especially minority male teachers, were voiced by one teacher and two individuals from the community. Although no one explicitly made the point that minority students, especially boys, benefit by knowing and encountering minority teachers, the Advisory Committee believes this to be true. The high school district superintendent also appears not to be content with the number of minority teachers and has done some recruiting of minority teachers. Still, just 7 of the 39 faculty hires in the district for the last 2 academic years have been minority (18 percent). The Advisory Committee feels that the administration should make greater efforts to hire and retain minority teachers, especially minority male teachers.

Most students and parents who testified spoke positively about Proviso West High School and the quality of race relations in the school. Most also acknowledged, some of them responding to questions from Advisory Committee members, that they are aware of racism in the school. Most of them went on to declare that they had not witnessed or experienced racism personally, and to assert that whatever racism exists at Proviso West, it is no worse than elsewhere. No one condoned racism or felt that the existence of any racism, even if limited, is acceptable. In some respects, it seems to the Advisory Committee that many in the school community hold themselves and the school to a higher standard of nondiscriminatory conduct and thinking than does the society at large.

In conclusion, the primary consideration in the provision of any education is the students. In this respect the comments offered by the students are most illuminating and perhaps most reflective of the racial and ethnic environment at the school. Their statements and other testimony raise two specific concerns about race relations and equal education opportunity at this racially and ethnically changing school.

First, it seems probable that a residual attitude of prejudice from parents and friends resides in the feeder communities to Proviso West High School.

Second, the students at Proviso West seem to have learned to tolerate and ignore prejudicial behavior at the school and among their peers as long as it is not directed towards themselves.

## Appendix I

Proviso West started as a jewel of a suburban high school. But then for 20 years the school board, faced with the needs of a growing influx of black students, fretted over maintenance and patronage hiring. Whites fled, standards fell and

# 'WE'RE ALL RACIST NOW'

BY H. G. BISSINGER

WHEN FIRST SPIED OFF the thick spine of the Eisenhower Expressway, Proviso West High School ruggests all the ingredients of a stable place. Its low-slung beige brick, undulating for acre after acre over the fairways and greens of the old golf course in Hillside, Ill., makes it seem more like a corporate campus than a suburban high school. Its location, nestled in a comfortable patch between a cemetery, a shopping mall and a movie theater, gives it the feel of a sanctuary sealed off from the monotone of Chicago's western suburbs, with their endless strip malls and four-lane highways and fast-food restaurants. In the strong early-morning light, when the school parking lot is empty of the rattle of cars, and students have not yet begun to congregate outside the metal doors waiting to be let in, there is something truly monumental about Proviso West, a place built in the helter-skelter suburban-boom-town days of the 1950's — and built to endure.

Inside the school there is the feel of a place where taxpayers' money was well spent — a kind of mini-Pentagon, with more than half a million square feet. Adjacent to the main complex is the high canopy of the field house with its fast track surfaces. There is the gym with row after row of rising bleachers, and the sparkling indoor pool, where a swimmer pulls smooth, fine strokes that barely break the water.

The grounds, at first glance, are just as lovely: well-kept wooden benches, an outdoor stage, the Senior Circle courtyard so filled with the chirping of birds that it sounds rigged — all the shrubbery impeccably man-

*H. G. Bissinger is the author of "Friday Night Lights," about the obsession of Odessa, Tex., with its high-school football team. He is currently working on a book about the future of the American city.*

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icured and flat topped. In one corner of Senior Circle there is an elegant sundial that was donated by the class of 1963. Near the sundial is a stone bench donated by the class of 1962 with an inscription that says, "The Future Belongs to Those Who Prepare for It."

Proviso West and its sister school, Proviso East, form what is known as Proviso Township High Schools District 209. Ten communities feed into the district, all of them in the near-western suburbs of Chicago, with populations ranging from 4,000 to 27,000. Beginning in the 1950's, many of them boomed from tiny villages into thriving, healthy communities. Some, like Bellwood, had their roots among the working class. Others, like Hillside and Westchester, were bedroom communities where median incomes and housing prices ranked among the top 35 percent of all Chicago suburbs. During this growth spurt they were also distinguished by something else — they were almost totally white. Of the communities feeding into the schools, only one, Maywood, had any black population to speak of in 1960. The others all had black populations of less than 1 percent.

It was in this era that Proviso (pronounced pro-VEYE-so) West was spawned. Built in the late 1950's with a $6.75 million bond issue, it was more than a school it was a symbol. At the dedication ceremonies on Nov. 14, 1958, the words of the American educator James Bryant Conant were invoked: "Our purpose is to cultivate in the largest number of our future citizens an appreciation of both the responsibilities and the benefits which come to them because they are American and free."

Later on, at the punch-and-cookie tours arranged by volunteers, several thousand people came to admire the place their tax dollars had built. And what a place it was, with floor-to-ceiling glass and sweeping curves and airy space, with touches like the tiled outdoor mall that could be used for student dances and the mosaic mural of Sioux Indian themes that arched its way along the western facade. The Chicago newspapers heralded the school's opening.

Thirty-six years later, those touches have become almost invisible. The mural is still there, but the blue of its tile is faded, almost lusterless. Students have been discouraged from using the Senior Circle since someone set fire to the shrubbery there a few years ago. Once-white curtains now spill out of the windows like dirty handkerchiefs hanging out of pockets. On a bulletin board in the social studies office, a teacher has posted a chart from Mad magazine showing that, one way or another, for today's students all academic roads lead to the same thing anyway — a job flipping burgers at McDonald's.

Over the past decade, Proviso West has experienced a dizzying degree of demographic and socio-economic change. In the 1990-91 academic year, 11 percent of the students were from low-income families. This year, the figure has almost doubled, to 19 percent. In 1973-74, the school, with roughly 4,500 students, was less than 1 percent Middle Eastern and Asian, nearly 2 percent Latino and 98 percent white. Now, 20 years later, there are only 2,300 students, of whom roughly 56 percent are black, 22 percent Latino, 18 percent white and the balance Asian.

Between 1970 and 1990, the population of the township shrank nearly 12 percent, to 152,000. Pockets of middle-class comfort became increasingly harder to find. Factories and companies that had once prospered there shut their doors. Looming over these unhappy developments was rampant white flight as the black population more than tripled, the white population plummeted. Whites are still the predominant racial group in Proviso Township, but in the past two decades their numbers have fallen to 40 percent.

Some whites who went to Proviso West in the 1970's would never, ever send their children there. They say the best thing to do would be to close it and sell it off to a big corporation. They describe it as a "jail" and complain about how the place is killing their property values. When asked to think of ways to improve the educational environment of the school, they come up with ideas like metal detectors and bad sweeps with K-9 police tracking dogs.

"I would say with metal detectors, I would feel a little bit better," says one parent, Antonia LoBello. "You never know who's going to come in a car and get you with an AK-47." (School officials say there has been only one shooting incident on Proviso West property in the history of the school.) As for the K-9 dogs, LoBello sees the idea as a plus for everybody. "So bring the dogs in. If nothing's happening, then what's the worry?"

LoBello has decided that her two children, both of whom are not even 10 yet, will not go to Proviso West. But the whole issue of public education is still very much on her mind. She served as the coordinator of Citizens United for Better Education, a movement founded by several Westchester residents in 1992 to explore the possibility of "de-annexing" their town from the Proviso high-school district. The idea was to join a neighboring district that had appreciably better American College Testing (A.C.T.) scores, that sent more students to college and that, like Westchester, was more than 90 percent white. The effort failed, but LoBello, a reservations agent for Southwest Airlines, is now working with the group on another plan in which Westchester and perhaps one or two other communities would separate from Proviso West and create their own school district.

Thomas Winkler, a lawyer from Westchester who is among those studying the new district idea, explains the impetus behind it: the needs of students from Westchester are simply no longer compatible with the needs of other Proviso West students. "You're just getting a very different student coming out of the Westchester elementary and middle schools, a much brighter student," says Winkler.

Blacks believe such assertions are unfair and insulting. Many students from Westchester may come to Proviso West better prepared to do the work, they say, but that does not make them inherently smarter than the school's other people. Wynnette Sykes, a professor at Malcolm X College in Chicago and the current president of District 209's school board, says: "There are some Westchester students who do well and some who do less so. You have high-achieving students of all races and economic backgrounds."

As proof, she points to her four children, who graduated from Pro-



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vise East and west on to academic success at M.I.T., Georgetown and West Point. She acknowledges that there are students at both Proviso East and Proviso West who are suffering academically but maintains that their problems are often the fault of the schools serving them.

Teaching must become more innovative, the school day must be lengthened, the community must pass property tax referendums for urgently needed improvements in instruction. "I think all kids can learn everything that we have to teach," she says. "The same things that the honors kids are taught can be learned by all kids."

"It's not that your child is better than my child," says Janice Bennett, whose daughter, Charise, ranks in the top 10 percent of the junior class at Proviso West. "It's only color that separates the two."

But that separation is becoming wider all the time. Proviso West is an example of the painful drama of race that is being played out in many communities. A kind of negative synergy is at work. Whites respond to integration by abandoning their communities the moment blacks move in. Blacks, seeking suburban refuge from the crime and chaos of the city just as whites did 20 years earlier, move, only to find themselves still isolated.

IT'S FRIDAY, AND TO BILL PATterson, a Proviso West social studies teacher, it's been a long week. The inspiration doesn't come so easily anymore, and it is on days like this, when he feels tired, just wanting to go home, that the VCR comes in so handy. It's the second video of the week for his sociology classes. The first was a "20/20" segment on an exorcism conducted by a Roman Catholic priest, and Patterson felt obliged to warn that the material, in which the subject of the exorcism screams and speaks in tongues and has to be tied to a chair, might be too scary to watch. Roughly 10 minutes into the film now being watched, the process of human reproduction is shown. Patterson hasn't said much so far, but the image of sperm meeting egg causes him to speak up.

"How many people know about this from personal experience?" he asks the class, which is made up of juniors and seniors and is mostly minority. "We got any fathers in



42 BEST COPY AVAILABLE 49

here? Any mothers?" Some of the students laugh embarrassedly, but then, this is Mr. Peterson, or Mr. P. as his students call him, and Mr. P. often jokes.

With the film playing, Peterson continues his line of questioning, whispering to a female student, "We got anyone pregnant in here?" She turns her head and looks at him almost quizzically, as if trying to figure out what on earth such a question has to do with sociology class. She says nothing, hoping to dismiss the whole thing with a little laugh, but he doesn't let up. "Come on, you'd know."

There are days, particularly with his junior honors class, when Peterson is an electric teacher. In trying to explain the theories behind the French Revolution, for example, he used to ask students to consider what it would be like if there were a revolution at Proviso West. He then assigned each of his students roles, producing a lively, spirited debate. He doesn't do much of that anymore, and he explains why: "I have run into problems now that I have a lot of black kids. They won't shut up."

Over the past 20 years, the school's academic performance has faltered. Some teachers say that students in general no longer have a thirst for learning. They're drowning in the immediacy of the cable age and the video age and are sadly incapable of viewing their future beyond the next 24 hours. These teachers also say that, given the changing economic landscape, it's difficult to blame students. It must be hard, they say, for a Proviso West student to walk across the frontage road to the mall and see empty storefront windows, or to hear stories from older friends who have come back home with their hard-earned college degrees and can't find jobs that will pay the rent, much less repay the tuition loans. "It breaks my heart when I think about what they're going to be in 10 years," says Ann Rebello, a social studies teacher, of her students.

Rebello is also acutely aware of the assumptions that are made about Proviso West students purely on the basis of their color. Upon hearing that she had taken a job at a school that was more than 80 percent minority, acquaintances immediately assumed she was "in a bad school with bad kids." They kept telling her that the only way to survive would be with toughness and rigidity. But when she got to Proviso West last fall as a new teacher, Rebello found students who were open, yearning for attention. "You don't have to be tough to teach here," she says.

Peterson, who is 53 and started at the school in 1971 when it was virtually all white, sees the place very differently. In relating what he believes is the inevitable decline of Proviso West into an underclass school, he stresses the socioeconomic changes that have transformed the township over the past 20 years but also focuses on one racial group — the blacks. His outspokenness has made him something of a patron saint among some white students. "There are some days I come in, I don't want to see anyone black," he says. "I've just had it."

Peterson cites the behavior of



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blacks in the hallways between classes ("The conduct of some of these black males is incredibly immature — the yelling, the screaming, the way they hit girls"). He talks about the time three blacks came into his class and started beating up one of his black students with a bat. (As it happened, none of the three attended the school.) He tells stories of white students who have dropped out because they couldn't stand being with blacks ("You know, Mr. P., I'm sitting in an English IV Academic class, and I'm sitting here with these black kids who can't even write a complete sentence"). He also tells the story of a former teacher, now retired, who moved to a small coastal island so he would never have to see another black face.

"I wish I could leave this year," says Peterson. "There are days I come here when I can hardly face it. I have to force myself."

PROVISO WEST WAS CONceived during an era of social and racial upheaval in America's cities. Blacks were moving to Chicago from the South by the thousands, and whites responded by getting out as fast as they could. Many of those whites set their sights on Proviso Township because of its proximity to the city, its strong economic base, its relatively cheap housing and its absence of blacks.

During most of the 1960's, Proviso West was exclusively white and Proviso East predominantly white. For most of the decade the schools were stable. The township was stable. But on Dec. 4, 1969, Fred Hampton, the leader of the Chicago Black Panthers, was killed by the police during an apartment raid on the city's West Side. Hampton had been a native of Maywood, where Proviso East is, and disorders at the school began on Dec. 10, when white students opposed a black-student-sponsored memorial assembly in Hampton's honor. Five days later, after 95 police officers were brought in to stop a rock-and-bottle-throwing melee, the school was closed.

The riots shook the township to its core. White flight began again, not in the traditional pattern from the city to the suburbs, but from Proviso Township to other suburbs. In 1970 in Maywood, there were 17,286 whites and 12,416 blacks. By 1980, the white total had dropped two-thirds and the black population had risen two-thirds. Neighboring Bellwood had once black residents out of 20,729 in 1960. Today, Bellwood is 71 percent black. People who remember the changeover in Proviso Township say it happened the way it did on the West Side of Chicago during the 1950's. The minute a black family moved into a Bellwood neighborhood, whites just emptied out. Only affluent Westchester was exempt from this trend. In 1970, out of 20,033 residents, Westchester had 12 blacks. By 1980, there were 14.

For a time, Proviso West High School remained insulated from the racial changes that were transforming the township. But in the late 70's, school officials say, the Federal Government began to question whether District 209 was practicing segregation at its two high schools, and the boundaries were voluntarily changed. Patricia Berens, who teaches English at Proviso West, still remembers the faculty meeting at which the boundary changes were announced. She remembers the eminent tone of the meeting, the clear suggestion that Proviso West teachers had no idea what they were in store for, considering how accustomed they had grown to the prototypical white suburban school setting — "the country club style," as the Chicago Tribune had described the school when it first opened.

"The implication was, it wasn't going to be pretty," says Berens. There was this feeling in the community that Proviso West "wasn't built for black kids," she says. "Black kids with white kids was going to ruin the education system over there." So the whites did what whites often do when the homogeneity of their environment is threatened. "In many ways, they abandoned the school."

But integrated schools can blossom in the suburbs, and as an example there's Oak Park, just a stone's throw from Proviso Township.

In the late 1960's, a noted urbanologist predicted that parts of Oak Park, which borders Chicago's West Side, would become virtually all black by 1980. But instead of throwing up their hands and fleeing for the suburbs, residents planned for integration and welcomed it. "It was a community-wide effort where the community made a decision to embrace diversity as a source of richness and a source of strength," says Donald Offerman, the principal of Oak Park and River Forest High School. To prevent white flight, realtors agreed not to indulge in the kind of panic-peddling and blockbusting that had been so rampant on the West Side of Chicago: whites being told that if they didn't sell their houses immediately, they would would be worth next to nothing a few months later when the block "went black."

To encourage a sense of stability, the village government passed an ordinance prohibiting "for sale" signs. Some dilapidated apartment buildings were purchased, restored and then remarketed to prevent them from falling prey to permanent blight. Black families were welcomed into the community and encouraged to buy homes on blocks where their presence would further integration. How well did such planning and commitment work? Over the past 20 years, housing prices in Oak Park have more than quadrupled. As for education, average A.C.T. scores at Oak Park and River Forest High School, which is 28 percent black and 4 percent Latino, are well above both the state and national averages and rank in the top 25 percent of all high-school districts in the Chicago area.

But Oak Park is an exception. "Most areas are doing nothing to insure from happening the destruc-



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ave process of racial change that has taken place in the central cities," says Gary Orfield, a professor of education and social policy at Harvard and the author of a recent study showing an accelerated trend toward segregation in the nation's schools since the late 1960's. The kinds of issues that Proviso is constantly up against — lack of financial support, lack of community support, racial hostility and white flight, unmotivated students — can be found in suburbs across the land. "This is what we should really be concentrating on right now," says Orfield.

His study, conducted for the National School Boards Association, showed that in the suburbs around the largest cities, 58 percent of blacks and 64 percent of Latinos attend schools that are at least half minority. Given that minority enrollment is rapidly increasing in these schools, the study predicted even greater suburban segregation unless "offsetting plans are put in motion." Instead, Orfield sees two distinct reactions among suburban school districts: first avoidance, then panic. "I get a call from a suburb every few days — 'Will you come and tell us what to do?'" says Orfield. "It's usually 10 to 15 years too late." As for those whites who think they can somehow avoid integration by moving away, he issues a quick and blunt response.

"The places they are moving to will go through the same process in 10 to 15 years."

CONTRARY TO PROVISO West's reputation for violence and turmoil, often fostered by people who have never set foot inside during school hours, the place is orderly and quiet. The curriculum, in the best tradition of public education, is expansive and Jeffersonian, offering courses ranging from the vocational to the college level. The students, rich and poor, black, Latino and white, say it is still possible to get a good education.

It is true that A.C.T. scores at Proviso West are below those of surrounding suburban districts. It is true that the number of students who go on to four-year colleges is not as high as in those districts. But it's also true that many Proviso students have come from the difficult streets of Chicago, and that even within their new communities the temptations of drugs and gangs may still be present. Many also come from families so troubled that just getting to school is a major accomplishment.

"We are at one of the most complex times in the history of this district," says Thomas Jandris, Proviso West's principal. When he came to the school in 1972, he saw a place that conformed to first-glance impressions off the Eisenhower Expressway — a classic and beautiful suburban school. "The façade was calm," he says. But once he got inside, it didn't take very long to realize something else entirely. "The undertow was incredible." Jandris found a place beset by an overwhelming flatness, as if nearly everyone who worked there had just about given up and accepted as a fait accompli the downward cycle of the school. The attitude toward students, he felt, was symbolized by the lack of doors on the bathroom entrances, even on the stalls inside.

"It's not very elegantly stated," says Jandris. "It sounds very simplistic, but education and the best interests of students have grown far apart." And for the past two years he has worked to bridge this gap. He put doors back on the bathrooms. He abolished the requirement for students to wear ID's around their necks like dog tags. At the same time, he has been tough, instituting a strict new attendance policy.

But he also knows that the road to recovery for Proviso West is long, and he speaks bluntly about two issues that make change so elusive. One is the conduct of a school board that for 20 years, during the most pivotal time in the history of the Proviso district, fretted excessively over maintenance contracts and patronage hiring and not enough over the educational needs of its students. The other issue that concerns Jandris may ultimately pose far more of a challenge. "The bigotry is the same as it's been for 10,000 years of humanity," he says. "It's based on ignorance and fear. It is alive and well in Proviso Township in very insidious ways."

Whites may not be sending their children to Proviso West in significant numbers anymore, but they still exert enormous influence over both Proviso West and Proviso East. The high-school district is still predominantly white and has a very high proportion of elderly residents. It doesn't take much imagination to wonder how white voters respond when asked to approve property-tax hikes so spending can be increased in two predominantly minority high schools.

Since 1968, there have been three referendums asking voters to approve increases in the property tax rate for Proviso Township High School District 209's education fund, and each has been defeated. Schools ask taxpayers for more money all the time, but in the Proviso district the need is double-edged: to maintain the current quality of education and also to afford better instruction for the students at both high schools who are considered at risk. The percentage coming into Proviso West with serious learning problems continues to grow, and administrators say that as many as 25 percent of all students at the school are "at risk" academically. "You want to stretch and prepare and help get ready those students who are clearly not ready now," says Dale Crawford, the district's assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. "They need more attention. The resources they need are significantly more than for the kid who is O.K."

Financial relief seems unlikely, however, either at the local or state level. School financing proposals are often talked about in the state capital, Springfield, but the net result of the impassioned rhetoric, says Peter Parrillo, Proviso Township High Schools' business manager, has been less. State educational aid has declined from 12 percent of the district budget in 1984 to about 7 percent for the fiscal year that ends in June. "I have always been appalled at the way in which the state of Illinois and the local officials of Cook County, have prostituted education in this state," says Parrillo, who is retiring this year and feels free to speak his mind.

If the State Legislature does nothing, and local taxpayers do nothing, the only other choice is obvious. Curriculum gets cut to the bone, extracurricular activities get cut to the bone, troubled students continue to flounder and the very mission of Proviso West, to provide a comprehensive education for everyone, becomes impossible to sustain. It turns

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into the educational equivalent of a public housing project. Those with the greatest needs stay because they have no other place to go; those with the greatest means flee farther west to other suburbs, or to the parochial and private schools that ring Proviso West like buzzards.

"You do a slash-and-burn cut," says James Boyd, a school board member. "Then the remaining ones who do care are going to leave."

In the meantime, some of those who work in the district continue to fight the good fight. A new superintendent was hired for the district in 1992 after a national search. New principals were put in place at Proviso West and Proviso East. The school board has been revamped. A carefully written mission statement has been distributed in the hope of creating unity and a strong sense of purpose.

Patricia Berent doesn't have a problem with educational credos. In her experience as a teacher at Proviso West since 1969, she has seen them come and go. On paper they sound wonderful, sometimes inspirational. But in her third-floor classroom during first period, they seem as vapid as the poster on the wall of Bo Jackson with a book in his hands. Most of the students in her remedial English class are freshmen who, though not typical of the majority of Proviso West students, read at the third-grade to the fifth-grade level, causing Berent to wonder what, if anything, they were taught before they got here. "It's too late to make these kids academically prepared for college," says Berent. "It's almost too late for them to be at a maturity level to get a good job." A girl sucks on a lollipop. A boy examines his fingernails.

Today, Berent's class and another remedial English class are working together. The assignment is to take a statement by a noted black figure and explain the essence of its meaning. Two gleaming banks of Macintosh computers flank the walls. The students sit down before them. There is the familiar whir and click of floppy disk into disk drive. Some just stare at the screen. Some play, piling up data window after window on the gleaming screen like thick layers of paint, to the point where they can no longer find the file they were working on in the *Continued on page 43*



46 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## HIGH SCHOOL

*Continued from page 33*

first place. Some write a sentence, maybe two, before becoming absolutely locked up, frozen, shifting from side to side, calling for the teacher because they need help, desperately need help.

"Miss Berest ... Hey, Miss Berest. ..."

She works the room diligently, poking and prodding and nurturing and negotiating, moving back and forth from Macintosh to Macintosh. She knows the children are trying, and she is trying. Slowly, bit by bit, words appear on the screens:

*The papal from wen Martin Luther King Jr. Lived did not wrly get along. Martin Luther King wanted wegth and blck people.*

*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Brogth the word to me and some of my friends in. That if a person do a job, he the best they can be, so I am. By cutting hair and putting S curr on popole hair. Like the other day, when I was looking at TV the door bell rung, and my little brother answer it. It wa three boys with some mast up hair coming wen my house. So I cut there hair, because they need it. And they were happy.*

*Violence in America is very bad. I saw a lot of bad things in my life, once I saw a boy get shot at a fair where I lived at it was about three people get shot that night. One time I saw this man get beat so bad that he was crying blood.*

ALEXIS WALLACE has that look on her face, eyes blazing, mouth slightly open, and she's walking through the aisles between desks on one of her patented search-and-destroy missions. Weren't they listening at the very beginning of the semester when she told them that Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" was one of her all-time favorites? Did they think she was joking? If they did, they won't be laughing now. And she knows who the slackers are. She knows who read Act I last night and who did not, who is for real and who thinks they can fake their way through a question by pleading that it was too hard to understand and, Come on, Mrs. Wallace, how were we supposed to figure out all that crazy language, "thou" this and "ye" that? Why do they think she gave the quiz at the beginning of class, and why do they think she immediately graded it and then read the scores aloud, one by one, in a very, very loud voice. "Fifty!" "Twenty!" "Fifty!"

"I did not say your scores to embarrass you. I said your scores to motivate you."

And now she is off through the classroom, and no one is safe, not even the girl at the back who has taken her pacifier out of its little plastic holder and is fervently sucking on it. "I want to make sure that you're getting it," she says almost reverly. "There is no shame. We're all learning." Her students in the class, sophomores in a college preparatory curriculum, aren't falling for it, and one thing is for sure: none of the students have their heads resting on their desks so they can take a little nap. In some classes you can do that and no one messes with you. But not in Mrs. Wallace's class.

She finds her primary victim. It is Keith. She reads a passage from "Julius Caesar," Act I, Scene II: "Why, there was a crown offered him: and being offered him, he put it by with the back of his hand, thus; and then the people fell a-shouting."

She asks Keith to explain. He says nothing. She repeats the passage, her voice even louder, so that pretty much everyone on all three floors of the school can hear it. He tries to say he doesn't understand it, but she cuts him off midsentence. She won't tolerate that excuse, because she knows what he can do when he does the homework, reads the study guides and adheres to the New Year's resolution that Wallace set for the class at the beginning of the semester: Positive Mental Attitude, P.M.A.

"You're not an imbecile. You're supposed to have an I.Q. over 101"

She reads another passage, and once again there is the same silence.

"Are you trying? Are you trying? No!"

He still plends ignorance, but it doesn't register. After all, he failed the quiz miserably, and that tells her it isn't a matter of aptitude but a matter of motivation and self-confidence.

"I am trying to open up the passage between the two ears," she says. She cusses off after that, the fire and brimstone replaced with a familial warmth, and after class, students rush up to her calling her "Mother," and she calls them "Baby." Ten years from now, few of the students in this class may remember a line of "Julius Caesar." But she is pretty sure some of them will forget the experience of having been taught it. Her teaching philosophy derives from remarking Frederick Douglass once said: "If nothing is expected of a man, he finds that expectation hard to contradict."

"We have some teachers who say these kids can't learn and don't know this and don't know that," says Wallace. "I think some teachers use it as an excuse. 'This is Proviso,' and they don't have to perform."

WHEN ERIC EVERLEY was hired as the first black Superintendent of District 209 in 1992, he found a similar atmosphere: "There was sort of a culture here, sort of a feeling that we tried everything and still our students are not successful." Everley's arrival from the Cherry Creek School District in Englewood, Colo., where he had been a principal and administrator for 18 years, was greeted with euphoria. School board members and teachers fawned on his doctorate in education from Harvard: it seemed incredible to them, almost a miracle, that anyone from Harvard would ever take any interest in Proviso. Since those heady moments

*Continued on page 50*

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## HIGH SCHOOL

*Continued from page 43*

there has been disappointment among many faculty members. Part of that feeling stems from his remote managerial style. Much of it stems from what he expects of Proviso students. There is something painfully ironic about this, since Eversley is bitterly faulted not for expecting too little, but too much.

Among other measures, he instituted a policy requiring all students to take a minimum of three solid subjects — like English, mathematics, science, social studies and a foreign language — every semester. Graduation requirements have been increased. At best, his detractors say, these changes are cosmetic. At worst, they are implemented only so they can be written up one day in the Harvard Educational Review, impressive on paper and of no practical effect in the classroom.

Eversley himself, while sympathetic to the demands of teaching today, has grave concerns about the child who can get lost in the system when teachers focus on all that a student cannot do; that's not something he learned at Harvard. When he met with the faculty and staff of the two high schools for the first time, he told them what it was like to grow up with an alcoholic father who beat him. He also told them what happened to him in high school and how he learned that the difference between success and failure is not the canyon so many believe it to be but a crevice, and that a child can be motivated to cross it by something as simple as a tap on the shoulder.

Eversley said he would never forget the counselor at Central High School in Minneapolis who told him that he should just go find a job somewhere, something to keep him out of trouble. It wasn't hard to figure out what the counselor was really telling him: he would never amount to anything. But he also told them about his English teacher, Mrs. Green, who yanked him out of typing class his senior year and made him sign up for advanced English instead. "The Superintendent believes that the road from where one is to where one can be is transferable," Eversley told the faculty and staff that day in August. "The Superintendent believes that every student can learn virtually everything we have to teach."

Precisely by saying that, Eversley alienated many in the room, people hoping to hear the opposite. To his detractors, the personal story of Eric Eversley does carry a distinct message: it is unique to Eric Eversley. What good, they ask, is increasing graduation requirements if students are unable to do what is required of them now? What good is elimination of tracking if it means pairing students who want to read Plato and Camus with students who say they can't read because reading makes them fall asleep? What do you do about the student who is flunking a course, knows that he can do better, promises to do homework and still flunks? These critics cite the fact that more than 40 percent of the students at both high schools had at least one nonpassing grade last semester. That high failure rate doesn't mean the schooling is too difficult; what it really means, and what is much more disturbing, is that many students see little point in succeeding in school because success in school has no relevance.

"Schools are about hope and the future," says Stephen Baquera, a Proviso East English teacher who advocates a complete restructuring of the school. "But if you don't have a hope, and you don't believe in the future, schools are oddly anachronistic. That's why students are not intimidated by failure. If they fail, it's too bad. Failure is the same as success."

WALLACE HAS heard all the arguments over relevance. She knows the failure rate is high, and she knows there are some students who see school as little more than a distraction. But she also knows there are many more who can be reached if a teacher takes the time and finds the passion to reach them.

The day after the debacle of "Julius Caesar," Act I, Wallace gives a quiz on Act II. The failure rate is high again, and she is not pleased, not pleased at all. Her mouth is pursed, as if she just tasted something sour, and she isn't interested in excuses, not interested in who had to do what after school. When the bell rings and students gather up their books, Wallace's eyes get that hunt-seeking glare.

"Sit down! This is my time. I'm talking!"

There will be a quiz on Act III. The scores will be read aloud so everyone knows exactly where they stand. And those who fail. . . .

"Tomorrow! Tomorrow! Anyone who doesn't pass the test has an after-school appointment! Let your parents know!"

"O.K., the day of reckoning is here," she says the next day as she begins to read the results, number and grade, as if it's really her own day of reckoning. "Seventy." "Eighty." "One hundred." "Eighty." "Eighty." "Ninety." "Ninety-seven." All but one of the students have passed. But Wallace still has something to say to the class, because she always has something to say to the class.

"Give yourselves a hand."

THE BRIGHTEST STUDENTS in the school are in a double-period honors course for juniors called American Stud-

*Continued on page 53*

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Continued from page 50

ics. Because is based on strict academic requirements, and the smiling face is on the agent's dream. The racial makeup of the students in the course is almost the opposite of the makeup of the school. Of the 32 students, only 7 are black and 4 Latino.

Most of the other students appear to take comfort in the honors courses. They like the intellectual challenge and also seem to relish any attention at school in which they are in the minority. As one student put it, her reasons for picking some of her elective courses has as much to do with social makeup as it does with course content. The more blacks there are in a course, the less inclined she is to take it: "I'm thinking, 'A lot of blacks in this class, a lot of blacks in this class, a lot of blacks in this class, ....'"

Six of the students in American Studies are open to any how they feel about going to school here. They feel that what they have to say is crucial to understanding the school. They also feel that, as members of the school's white minority, they often go unheard. They are involved in extracurricular activities. They do well in school. They all want to go to college, and they all have ambitions to become lawyers and doctors and business executives. Most of them live in Westchester, where they are almost no blacks and did not even have a single black student at their grammar schools.

As the six students begin to describe the school they were a little like children assembling a picture. "It's like going to hell here," says one. "I get pushed, and because I'm white I can't say anything because there's too many of 'em. I'll get my butt kicked."

"They think they can touch you, they think they can do anything to you."

"I cannot stand the room. I'll never date anyone who isn't white."

"They're always saying 'them' this and 'them' that. Sorry, I don't know a damn, I never owned a slave. I'm sick of them throwing it in our face."

When asked to describe a typical black, one of the students responds this way: "Ignorant, rude, loud."

"Ignorant and rotten, a lot of poverty, self-righteous, you name me them, you see me this, ignorant, ignorant," says another.

One student brings up a scene in "2001: A Space Odyssey" when a group of apes gave one of comment: "It's a typical day in the hallways, that's what it looks like here." Others laugh and nod their heads approvingly. They think it's a good description. They like it.

Despite this atmosphere, they all agree that they have gotten a strong education at Proviso West. They also have a potential solution for fixing the school's problems: remove the predominantly black town of Hallwood from the school's attendance boundaries. Or, if that won't work, remove almost exclusively white Westchester from the attendance boundaries and let in students go someplace else. As they talk about it, it sounds almost like a liberation movement in an occupied territory. They sound just like their parents.

ON ANOTHER DAY, the seven blacks enrolled in American Studies file into an empty classroom to speak their minds. They, too, are honors students. They, too, plan to go to college. They, too, have ambitions to be lawyers and doctors and businessmen, and they all come from Hallwood, the place the white students would dump from the attendance boundaries. They say they are acutely aware of a double standard that exists for them among whites, the expectations that they can't do the work. At the beginning of the year it was made clear to the American Studies class that those who could not keep up could be asked to leave. That standard is one of the reasons the course is so good. "Everybody looked at us," says Janice Bonner. Four students were asked to leave during the school year, all of them white. And when a cheating scandal broke out, it was among white students.

When they talk about whites, it isn't with bitterness but with frustration, almost amusement. Of the seven, only one says that the experience of being at Proviso West has made her feel more prejudiced against whites. They laugh about the way whites insist on talking to them in what they think is "black dialect" — the way they say "What's up" and "Hey, girl." They also laugh at the way whites, when they go on field trips, stare out the windows of the bus and exhibit over gratified, as if they had never seen it before. The whites strike them as being intolerant and unruly successes of the larger world outside their communities.

These black students also talk about the way other black students often treat them, about how they are accused of being "uncle" and "whitey" because they are on the honors track. "Why are you in a class with all the white kids?" they are asked. "Why are you using a white man's book?" Steven Pinson Jr., the one black male in American Studies, says such comments unwisely. "They are shocked that a black male can read," he says. "They expect me to take the book and throw it in my locker." He described the following interplay between another and student as being typical.

"Brenna son, I'm just trying to wake you up so you can pay attention."

"Well, I'm going back to sleep because you ain't explaining."

Because of the experiences that many white (and black) students have of them, these seven students take almost entirely in their own world. "We're not accepted by the white people because they think we're not smart enough," says Lorna Booker. "We're not accepted by black people because they think we're too smart. So we just hang with each other."

But they continue to believe in the school, and they are committed to it, and so are many of their parents. Lorna Booker's father, Lee, is a member of the school board. Chaine Bonner's mother, Janice, is so involved in her daughter's education that students, if they believe in self-preservation, should just run when they see her, for as Janice Bonner puts it: "If something happens to my child, somebody's in trouble."

Because of all the rumors of violence swirling around Proviso West, Janice Bonner sent her daughter to a parochial school her freshman year. But the atmosphere there, which included fights during chapel, wasn't what she expected from any school, much less one that was costing her $4,000 a year. So Chaine went to Proviso West, where she has excelled, has been challenged and is said by many students to be the smartest student in the school. Her mother, a supervisor with AT&T nearby in Oak Brook, is aware that her

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daughter is perceived as being something of an anomaly at the school, but it doesn't bother her a whole lot as long as Cherise continues to get a good education.

"She hasn't sold out to Whitey," says Jeanne Bennett. "She's sold out to her course, who will kick her butt." Through her daughter, she is also aware of how many white students are disgruntled and want to leave. But she knows the survival of Proviso West depends on their staying, not because they're any smarter than her daughter, but because of the political and economic clout they carry. "If all the white children choose to leave," she says, "and it's just Hispanics and blacks, the quality of the school will go down."

OF THE COMMUNITIES IN THE HIGH-school district, Westchester is by far the wealthiest. The median home price, $127,200, is more than $50,000 higher than that of Bellwood. Only about 5 percent of Proviso West's students come from Westchester, but, because of its property values, Westchester accounts for about 18 percent of the district's tax base. This disparity does not sit well with many who live there, nor does the dwindling academic performance of the school, which is why Citizens United for Better Education was created with the goal of re-aligning Westchester with a high school in neighboring Lyons Township.

Lyons Township High School did perform better academically than Proviso West in several key areas, but the statistic that received the most attention had to do with racial breakdown. At the time de-annexation was being discussed, Proviso West was 27 percent white. Lyons Township 92 percent white. "They would call me and say, 'I don't want my white daughter to go to school with those blacks over there,'" recalls Robert Milano, the former principal of Proviso West. "But the minute they had their meetings, they said, 'Oh, no, it's not racial.'"

But David Ricordati, a Westchester village trustee, who spearheaded the movement, calls the charge of racism a convenient smoke screen for the rapid educational and social decline of the school: "For them to hang their hat on race, that's a very easy out." Because the issue of de-annexation is fraught with legal and procedural complications, it died without much progress. But Ricordati says he thinks negative feelings about Proviso West have only intensified among those who live in Westchester because "they think it's a lost cause, that it cannot be turned around."

RELUCTANTLY, ALMOST PAINFULLY, Al and Becky Lasky would probably agree. Unlike other Westchester citizens who rail against the school and criticize it, the Laskys have a different vantage point — they actually sent their two daughters there because they felt it was important. They wanted to make a statement to Westchester residents, to say that there is a choice in Proviso West, a good choice. "I've had parochial school shoved down my throat all my life," says Becky Lasky. "We wanted our kids to be in a bigger environment. We were so excited about them being in a multicultural environment."

They joined the parent-teacher organization at the school, but the number of parents you could count on — 30 to 40 out of a student population of more than 2,000 — never increased. And it struck them, as it struck others, that despite newspaper articles and calls





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to students' homes, attendance at these meetings was about 80 percent white in a school that was 80 percent minority.

In 1991, they campaigned for a tax referendum to provide more revenue for the district's education fund. It was defeated. The Laskys and others couldn't help but realize that if all the parents from Bellwood whose children went to Proviso West had voted yes the referendum might well have passed.

Their daughters began to describe an atmosphere at school that didn't seem racially harmonious, but pretty and almost totally segregated. "I had this feeling that blacks and whites and yellows and greens can all work together," says Becky Lasky. "I raised my kids with that philosophy. I found out that no matter how hard you try, you never get anywhere." As a result, Al and Becky Lasky are no longer on the board of the parent-teacher organization. When the next referendum comes around, it seems doubtful that they will campaign. Their youngest daughter, Kimberly, is a junior at Proviso West, and they are just waiting for her to graduate so that, as Al Lasky puts it, "We're done."

"We fought the war and we lost," he says. "That's how I feel. If we had to do it differently, I think we would."

Al Lasky insists that race has little to do with the problems of Proviso West. But Kim, sitting with him in their tidy living room, disagrees. "It's all about race," she says. That comment bursts straight to the soul.

"You don't start out as racist," says Kim. "We're all racist now."

IT'S THE END OF ANOTHER day at Proviso West, and for Dennis Bobbe, a social studies teacher, it's not a moment too soon. He came to the school in 1966 when it was at its apex, filled with those seemingly timeless shows of spirit, the pep rallies, the sock hops, the current debates over war and peace. Now, it's nobody's school, all the spirit sucked dry. He finds nothing remarkable about Proviso West at all, except, perhaps, for the pathos. "They're unwilling resisting learning," he says of his students. "They just don't want to learn. It's not fun. It's too much effort." He pauses, and then takes a turn inward.

"Maybe it's me."

He knows they're bored to tears. He knows what their ability to analyze or do something in-depth is. He knows what the pop culture effects of television and music are. "the bing-bang-boom," as he calls it.

"I can't compete."

He caters to them, minimizing the complexity of the material and the amount. He tries to be an entertainer, even though that contradicts his whole persona — beard, soft voice, pudgy body. "Kids come in asking for a routine. A vaudeville show. Abbott and Costello. Who's on first?" He talks about United States history and he sees the glaze set in their eyes. He could lecture naked. He could lecture upside down. He could not lecture at all. Would they even notice? He's getting too old, too entrenched to grope for meaningful answers. "I am near the end of my career."

Yet he wonders what happened to the notion of the American public school as a sacred place, a vital place, a place unlike any other in the world. "What was it that pushed away? What was it that was lost?"

It is a gray, late-winter day as he teaches his seventh-period class. He has pulled down a map depicting the boundary changes in Europe during World War I. Over another blackboard hangs a pithy statement that reads, "Not Preparing! Is Preparing Not to Pass." As Bobbe talks about the war, he tries to engage everyone, including those who have their heads on their desks.

"Who is Herbert Hoover?" he asks.

"The vacuum guy?" asks one student.

"Overall, there were 10 million killed in the military in World War I," says Bobbe.

A girl yawns.

He tells them that Woodrow Wilson had once been the president of Princeton University.

"What do you mean, while he was President?" asks a student.

"No, before," says Bobbe.

He introduces Wilson's 14 points. He introduces some of the post-World War I European leaders: Clemenceau, Lloyd George.

"Boy George?" says a student.

"All right, we'll stop here. Monday, I won't be here. We'll have a movie."

The bell rings and the students shuffle out of class.

There are two narrow windows in Bobbe's classroom. From them you can see a thin line of students leaving the building. They walk past the drab wheat colors of the baseball field and the brown concrete of the football stadium. Some gather in clumps outside the tall metal gates of the school at the bus stop. Others walk past the mall, where so many stores are closed.

Maybe it's the way they seem so anonymous and swallowed up in their jackets, with those oversize hoods and long hemlines. Maybe it's just the grayness and chill of the ceaseless Midwestern winter. But from Bobbe's narrow windows, as they walk slowly away, for a moment, just a brief moment before they disappear, they look as if they have just finished a day shift at the factory instead of a day at school. ■

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## Appendix II
## Letters from the Commission to the Attorney General and Secretary of Education

June 6, 1994

The Honorable Janet Reno
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
10th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Ms. Reno:

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights views with great concern the situation prevailing in the suburban Chicago Proviso Township High Schools District 209, as described in recent media reports (see the enclosed article from *The New York Times*, May 29, 1994).

The racial attitudes and inappropriate classroom behavior ascribed to certain staff, if true, may combine to deprive minority students of their constitutional right to equal educational opportunity. The circumstances reported in the media seem to warrant in-depth review and investigation by your office to determine whether the district has violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other laws barring discrimination in public schools and in federally assisted programs. We urge you to undertake an investigation and inform us as to the results of your inquiry, including any corrective measures you may propose.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

FOR THE COMMISSION,

MARY FRANCES BERRY
Chairperson

Enclosure





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June 6, 1994

The Honorable Richard Riley
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights views with great concern the situation prevailing in the suburban Chicago Proviso Township High Schools District 209, as described in recent media reports (see the enclosed article from *The New York Times*, May 29, 1994).

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I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

FOR THE COMMISSION,

MARY FRANCES BERRY
Chairperson

Enclosure

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## Appendix III
## Letter from Jeff VanderMolen to the *New York Times Magazine*, published June 26, 1994

As a student at Proviso West and co-editor-in-chief of our school paper, I found your article one-sided. With such a racially and ethnically diverse student body and faculty, I have gotten to know different cultures firsthand, something you cannot get from a classroom lecture.

In your article, Bill Paterson was depicted as a racist. I had a class with Mr. P., as we call him, for the past year, and not once have I seen that side of him. The man I've come to admire has participated in marches for equal rights, helped fight for voting rights and stood up for blacks in a recent class debate on racism in America.

Jeff VanderMolen
Westchester, Ill.

## Appendix IV
## Faculty Institute Agenda, Proviso Township High Schools, August 25, 1994

General Session: All Certified and Noncertificated Staff

Welcome and Introductions.....8:00 a.m.
Dale R. Crawford, Assistant Superintendent

Opening Address.....8:15 a.m.
"Serving All Students Well"
Eric L. Eversley, Ed.D., Superintendent

Synergy of Others.....9:00 a.m.
Cultural Diversity in the Workplace, SST Communications

Breakout Sessions: Certified Staff

Breakout Sessions: Round #1.....10:10 a.m.

The School Improvement Plan

Graduation Requirements and Outcomes

A World of Difference

Technology: Where We Are and Where We Want To Be

Quality Relationships: Students and Staff

Project Prometheus

Conversation with the Superintendent

After the New York Times Magazine: "Sorting Out the Issues"

Collaborative Teaching

Building Cross-Cultural Competence

Effective Time Management for Teachers

Lunch.....11:30 a.m.

Breakout Sessions: Round #2 .....12:40 p.m.
Morning Breakouts Repeated

Breakout Sessions: Round #3 ..... 2:00 p.m.
Morning Breakouts Repeated

Dismissal at 3:20 p.m.

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

A World of Difference is a training program designed to help teachers combat bigotry and racism while encouraging understanding and respect among racial, religious, and ethnic groups in the classroom. through an interactive approach, this session will help teachers address diversity in the classroom, examine their own and others' biases, and expand their own and their students' cultural awareness.

AFTER THE *NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE*: "SORTING OUT THE ISSUES"

A facilitator will work with participants to identify and strategize around the issues raised by the May 29, 1994, *New York Times Magazine*. Participants will discuss ways to confront the *Times* article in a variety of contexts -- teacher to teacher, teacher to student, student to student, teacher to parent -- in an effort to strengthen our abilities as individuals and as members of an organization to work effectively with cultural diversity.

(NOTE: Participants may remain in this session as long as they wish or join the session during any breakout; this session will be the basis for an on-going program during 1994-95.)

BUILDING CROSS CULTURAL COMPETENCE

What are the knowledge, skills, and attitudes teachers need to promote the highest levels of academic success among students of all cultures? This session answers that question by examining ten themes emerging from educational research in learning in multicultural settings. Among the issues highlighted are communication techniques, instructional strategies, and varied learning styles.

(NOTE: This session will be the basis for an on-going staff development program during the 1994-95 school year.)

## Appendix V
## Response of H.G. Bissinger*

**H.G. BISSINGER III**

7914 Ardleigh St.
Phila., PA 19118

July 26, 1995

Constance Davis, Regional Director
United States Commission on Civil Rights
Midwestern Regional Office
Xerox Centre, Ste. 410
55 West Monroe St.
Chicago, IL 60603

Dear Ms. Davis:

Enclosed is my written response to the draft report. Given the tenor of the testimony of the witnesses, I hope that my response be printed in full. It seems only fair given the slanderous attack that was heaped upon me for telling the truth. If there are any questions I can be reached at: 215-247-4721.

Sincerely,

H.G. Bissinger III

* Pursuant to Commission administrative procedure, a draft of the report, "Race Relations and Equal Education Opportunity at Provisn West High School," was provided to H.G. Bissinger, author of the article, "We're All Racist Now." His response was received by the Midwestern Regional Office on July 26, 1995, and is presented in its entirety.

**RESPONSE TO THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS: RACE RELATIONS AND EQUAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY AT PROVISO WEST HIGH SCHOOL:**
**By H.G. Bissinger**

When I learned that the United States Commission on Civil rights would be conducting hearings at Proviso West High School based upon the article I wrote for the New York Times, my first reaction was one of gratification. I had spent nearly two months at the school in 1994 in preparation for the article, and I came away convinced that the racial atmosphere existing there was not isolated but representative of the country as a whole. But the more I thought about the hearings, the more trepidation I felt. I have been a reporter for 20 years, and I know by now the inevitable community reaction to reportage that is incisive and honest to the bone. Instead of any real contemplation or serious wish to address the issues, what invariably follows is a kind of mob action to kill the messenger.

After reading your report, *Race Relations and Equal Education Opportunity at Proviso West High School*, my worst fears have been confirmed. What could have been a serious and urgently needed discussion largely digressed into a slanderous witch hunt against myself and *the New York Times Magazine*. As I say, I am not surprised by that reaction, only saddened by it. I also want to make something emphatically clear:

*I stand by every single word in this story, not 95 percent, or 98 percent, but 100 percent. Every single word of what was written was honestly reported. No one was misquoted. Nothing, absolutely nothing, was taken out of context. Nothing was embellished or heightened.*

This story was subjected to my own rigorous standards as a reporter, which includes a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting, a Nieman fellowship at Harvard, and a best-selling non-fiction book. It was also subjected to the thorough and rigorous editing and factchecking process of the *New York Times Magazine*.

While I applaud the efforts of the Illinois Advisory Committee in addressing the crucial issue of racial attitudes at an American high school, I cannot help but question the wisdom of thinking that the very private matter of race could ever be genuinely discussed in the forum of a public hearing. In my experience not simply as a reporter but as a member of the human race, it is very difficult to get anyone to talk honestly about race in private, much less in public with peers, colleagues and the media zeroing in on every word.

So why was the reaction to the story so extreme? Because certain people within the story got caught. Caught at what? Caught at speaking honestly about the subject of race without any awareness of the hideousness and repugnance of their comments. What happened after they were exposed? They reacted the way most of us would, by trying to deflect their shame onto someone else. In my career as a reporter, I have never been through a more disturbing and shocking experience than that Winter Afternoon in 1994 when I interviewed six white honor students at Proviso West High School. I purposely picked these students because they represented the academic best and brightest of Proviso.

By virtue of their intellectual enlightenment, I also thought they might be less prone to racial stereotypes. Here is a taste of what they had to say about blacks as quoted in the article:

*I cannot stand the race. I'll never date anyone who isn't white.*

*They're always saying 'slave' this and 'slave' that. Sorry, I don't know a slave. I never owned a slave. I'm sick of them throwing it in our face.*

*Ignorant and scum, a lot of poverty, self-righteous, you owe me that, you owe me this, gimme, gimme, gimme.*

In reading the testimony of those who appeared before the committee, comments such as these were dismissed as being incidental and unimportant. If those dismissals didn't work, then Plan B went in effect and I as the reporter was accused of putting words into people's mouths or making up quotes altogether. With the laudable exception of superintendent Eric Eversley, person after person who came before the committee bent over to an almost absurd degree to describe Proviso West as a perfect and harmonious place. That simply was not the case during the period in 1994 in which I was there. The attitudes of various students and teachers that I accurately quoted did not reflect that. Nor did the demographic data: In 1973-74, Proviso West High School was 98 percent white. Twenty years later the school was 18 percent white, despite the fact that whites were still the predominant racial group in Proviso Township. What does that mean? We can paint pretty pictures and be politically correct, but the answer is obvious: As blacks and Latinos started coming into the high school, white parents started pulling their children out.

Does that make Proviso West High School somehow unique? Of course it doesn't. The racial transformation that has taken place there has taken place at thousands of high school across this country. Just look at our urban schools. And as the article shows, it is now time we start looking at our suburban ones.

What is that racial transformation caused by? The experience of Proviso West, if it tells us anything, tells us that it caused by fear, misunderstanding, resentment, and in some cases outright contempt. I did not write this article with the intention of hurting or embarrassing anyone. But I did write it with the intention of telling the truth, however painful, because the parable of Proviso West is the parable of our modern America. If people in the community wish to respond with outrage and denial, that is their right. But I will not take back a single word, because I am proud of what I wrote.

J.S. Bo
July 26, 1995

U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS
Midwestern Regional Office
55 West Monroe Street
Chicago, IL 60603

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